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ABSTRACT

The role of small enterprise in Australian school students' workplace learning was examined. First, the literature on structured workplace learning in Australia, Europe, and North America was reviewed. Next, four structured learning programs in South Australia and four in New South Wales were studied. Interviews were conducted with a total of 41 students, 18 school staff, and 26 small enterprise personnel. The following were among the key research findings: (1) there is little shared coherent understanding between schools and small business enterprises as to what constitutes "structured workplace learning"; (2) small enterprises were not normally informed about the nature of structured workplace learning; (3) students did not generally understand the differences between "structured workplace learning" and "work experience"; (4) employers generally saw few benefits to their firms from taking on workplace learning students; and (5) the framework for structured workplace learning has been targeted at big business and has been constructed predominantly from the schools' perspective. The study confirmed the need for further improvement of the relationships between schools and small enterprises and the need to foster more meaningful workplace learning for students based on models of partnership. The school personnel, student, and small enterprise interview proformas and discussion questions are appended. (Contains 79 references.) (MN)

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Acronyms

MCEETYA	–	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
SWL	–	structured workplace learning
VET	–	vocational education and training
TAFE	–	technical and further education
ECEF	–	Enterprise and Career Education Foundation
RTO	–	registered training organisation
REAL	–	rural entrepreneurship through action learning
ANTA	–	Australian National Training Authority
ITAB	–	industry training advisory body
AQF	–	Australian Qualifications Framework
SACE	–	South Australian Certificate of Education
VCE	–	Victorian Certificate of Education
NCVER	–	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
SME	–	small and medium enterprise
OHS&W	–	occupational health safety and welfare

Executive summary

The purpose of this research was to investigate current practices in school–small enterprise links, to examine current literature in relation to structured workplace learning, to identify issues and common themes, to develop an integrated theoretical framework for structured workplace learning and to make suggestions regarding future directions. The research involved structured interviews with owners, managers and staff of small enterprises, principals and senior staff of schools, vocational education and training (VET) practitioners in schools and technical and further education (TAFE), community organisations and Year 11 and 12 students in two Australian States—New South Wales and South Australia.

A review of literature in the field demonstrated that most of the literature relating to structured workplace learning (SWL) had been written from the viewpoint of the schools and the curriculum, not the small enterprise. Some literature outlining possible relationships between adult education and formation of learning partnerships between educational institutions and small enterprises provided examples of areas where further research may be directed. Particular models from community colleges in the United States furnished examples of partnerships between schools and businesses in local and regional contexts.

The key research findings from the interviews were as follows:

- There was little shared coherent understanding between schools and small business enterprises as to what constitutes 'structured workplace learning'.
- Small enterprises were not normally informed about the nature of structured workplace learning.
- Students did not generally understand the differences between 'structured workplace learning' and 'work experience'.
- While employers generally displayed considerable altruism by taking on workplace learning students, they saw few benefits to the small enterprise other than 'feel good' considerations.
- Mechanisms had not been established that involved the small enterprise in the design of structured work placements, including the assessment of students.
- Employers regarded 'attitude' as the most important attribute that they wished students to display when undergoing structured workplace learning.
- The framework for structured workplace learning has been targetted at big business which often has a significant training component. However, the same situation does not apply to small enterprises.
- Structured workplace learning has been constructed predominantly from the perspective of schools and does not adequately reflect models of partnerships.

A theoretical framework was developed which draws upon the findings of the literature review and field interviews and which proposes the exploration of new models of workplace learning and school and small enterprise learning partnerships. The framework argues that VET and structured workplace learning need to be situated within a broader conceptual framework. In this way the relevant issues can be adequately analysed and understood and the complexities addressed. Further exploration of ways of implementing structured workplace learning at a local level will require an awareness of the broader framework.

The framework developed recognises that young people are in transition from one form of learning in the schools, into the adult world of work and a new form of learning. The integration between the theory from the school and the experience in the workplace is the central dynamic from which meaning can be constructed to benefit the student, the school, the small enterprise and the community.

The theoretical framework outlined in this report proposes the construction of learning partnerships based on mutual needs and benefits, in which transactions occur between stakeholders that benefit each party and help lead to the creation of a competent and multiskilled youth workforce. The framework explores the concept that young people can 'add value' to the small enterprise, the school, the community and ultimately to themselves. The report offers three models to promote further the proposition of structured workplace learning in small enterprises. The models cover the areas of information technology, small business and school links; brokerage; and partnerships. The first two are based on existing models in New South Wales and South Australia, while the third has been created from research findings highlighting the advantages of schools and small enterprises working in partnership. This framework has the potential to assist in the rejuvenation of local and regional economies, enhance the social capital of depressed areas, and lead to greater employment growth by engaging the energies of a range of community stakeholders and integrating the talents of young people into local and regional economies.

This study has shown that there is an urgent need to further improve the relationships between schools and small enterprises and to foster improved, and more meaningful structured workplace learning for young people. The three exemplars described in the report indicate the directions that could be taken. Since the theoretical framework reinforces the need for partnerships within the community, the researchers make the following suggestions for improvement in the quality of outcomes for young people and small enterprises:

- the need for greater awareness amongst all stakeholders of the potential benefits to small enterprises and to young people of a well-organised and -conceptualised program of structured workplace learning
- the need for stronger links between schools and local business communities
- an analysis of how well-defined community partnership arrangements can ensure brighter futures for young people, while building local prosperity as well as human and social capital
- the adoption of clear and explicit objectives related to school students' enterprise learning that would lead to greater voluntary and enthusiastic participation of the small enterprises sector based on their perceived expertise in this vital economic development area

Accordingly, the researchers highlight the need for:

- activities and materials that promote awareness of changes to senior secondary curriculum in the vocational education area and the associated benefits to community, business and education sectors
- programs and funding arrangements which promote closer links between, and active participation of, small enterprise and education personnel in joint activities
- infrastructure funding that further develops community partnerships, fostering their autonomy in developing local arrangements for establishing work-based learning environments for young adults
- further development of enterprise education methodologies, materials and teacher preparation programs.
- activities in the area of linking education and business at the local community level, to be directly responsive to regional economic and social development, and particularly to local skill shortages and over-the-horizon industry needs
- further research into and documentation of the actual benefits to various stakeholders in partnership models, such as those developed in this study, particularly of the advantages to small enterprises as these appear to be the least understood and publicised

- **further research into the operation of one or two best-practice models in order to understand more fully the dynamics and interplay between stakeholders within particular types of environments** (for example, rural/metropolitan, low/high socio-economic status communities)

Introduction

One of the most interesting innovations in Australia's training reform over the past decade has been the introduction of vocational education and training (VET) into schools. The intent has been to improve students' options and increase youth employment by building workforce skills and providing opportunities to learn about the world of work. In September 1996, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) Ministerial Council decided to provide $20 million of ANTA's funds each year to fund VET-in-Schools programs and this funding was made available for the first time in 1997 to government and non-government education systems in each State and Territory. Priorities for these funds included the development of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, support for initiatives that led to apprenticeships and traineeships, and support for existing successful projects (ANTA 1998, p.14). February 1998 saw the endorsement by the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) of a set of principles to underpin the implementation of VET in schools, and commencement of the development of curriculum materials based on training packages for use in schools.

Approximately 57% of VET programs in schools have as an integral component, some form of industry link involving placement in the world of work (Malley, Ainley & Robinson 2001). Ainley (1998, p.59) claims that such linked programs have emerged as an important innovation in a context of historically high levels of participation in the upper secondary years, a decline in the opportunities for full-time work by young people, and a realisation that deferred entry to work may have deleterious consequences for individual development.

Work placements

There are generally two forms of placement of school students in industry—work experience placements and vocational placements. Misko (2000, p.2), who focusses on work experience in her publication, characterises the difference between them in the following ways. The first category includes those placements available to all students whatever courses they are undertaking at school, generally one or two weeks in a workplace of their choice with the aim of providing an opportunity to experience what it is like to be at work and to observe and learn about an industry or occupation. The second category includes those placements that normally involve structured workplace learning. This type of placement is more highly structured and industry-specific, includes formal assessment and performance recorded in a log book or record book, and is arranged typically by teachers or vocational placement co-ordinators with selected employers. It is with this second category that this study is concerned; that is, with structured workplace learning involving planned activities in the workplace that lead to defined learning outcomes (Smith & Keating 1997, p.92).

The development of vocational education in schools has proceeded in a number of diverse ways. The growth has been so diverse that it has been hard to establish national statistics to indicate its extent (Ainley 1998, p.58). The most recent picture of structured workplace learning (SWL) is the study by Malley, Ainley and Robinson (2001), *Witnessing evolution*, based on a survey in 1999 of a sample of just over 700 schools across Australia.

From this report the following figures in terms of SWL can be derived—that it includes school-based new apprenticeships (15% of programs), VET in schools with work placement (75%) and other workplace learning programs (10%). SWL is a subset of all workplace learning: 86% of schools in 1999 had workplace learning for Years 11 and 12 students, and 80% of schools had

SWL. SWL involves a subset of all VET-in-Schools programs: 57% of such programs in 1999 involved SWL. Most schools provide at least one workplace learning program in Years 11 and 12. This has grown rapidly, from 46% of schools in 1995, to 86% of schools in 1999 (80% SWL) (Malley et al. 2001).

The report highlighted a growing complexity in institutional partnerships relating to school–industry programs. Apart from school–school and school–TAFE collaboration, 62% of schools with partnership programs reported that they maintained employer-based management committees; 54% of schools reported that employers assisted in the planning of programs and 57% indicated that employers assisted in program implementation, in addition to receiving students in the workplace. The report concludes that to have more than half of the schools indicating additional employer support is noteworthy, but raises the question of how to extend this type of support to other schools.

In the context of the structural changes to Australia's training system, comparatively little is actually known about the relationships being generated between schools and small enterprises by vocational education and training (and in particular, SWL). Apart from a study conducted by Smith et al. (1996), there has been very little research of small enterprise training demands and their support (if any) of structured work placements for school-aged adolescents.

Given that governments (federal and State) strongly support the MCEETYA framework for vocational education in schools, as well as efforts to advance the training capacity of small enterprises and their linkage (through partnerships) to vocational education in schools, research is required to examine the impact on schools and small enterprises. This study therefore builds upon previous work and explores models that might further promote the concept of SWL. Without research of this nature, government policy to foster the expansion of VET (particularly SWL) in schools in partnership with industry (particularly small enterprises) runs the risk of being ineffectual. Prior to this government initiative, the gap between the world of work and public schooling had widened, fuelled by the dominance of a universal general education policy, the preoccupation with higher education pathways and the necessity for small enterprises to concentrate on survival in tight economic times.

Small business and VET

Small enterprises and the vocational education sector have very different goals, methods and practices (Harris et al. 1998). However, research into effective partnerships between schools and small enterprises in relation to SWL may result in the development of good practice models and a theoretical framework for SWL that supports both parties working together to improve SWL arrangements, and ultimately the learning outcomes for students. Participants at the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF) Research Forum in May 2001 highlighted many gaps still remaining in research on SWL. Some of the identified gaps relevant to this study include (ECEF 2001b):

- research into emerging models—the area of collaborative community partnerships was chosen by more participants for discussion relating to action plans than any other
- views of teachers and practitioners of SWL programs
- research with employers to explore how to convert awareness into participation, how to retain current employers and how to re-engage former employer participants

For the purpose of this research, the Australian Bureau of Statistics definition of a small enterprise as a business with less than 20 employees was used. Small enterprises in Australia provide substantial employment (approximately 65%) for young Australians and represent about 90% of all enterprises in Australia (Robinson 1999, p.3).

For this research, which began in 1998, the working definition of structured workplace learning was that adopted by MCEETYA (1997). The VET-in-Schools Taskforce of MCEETYA proposed the following five features in its definition of SWL as endorsed by Ministers in 1997—integrated, structured, monitored, regulated and assessed.

Quality SWL is *integrated* into a VET program

- It operates within the context of vocational qualifications which are nationally recognised by industry, are responsive to industry needs and form part of a student's exit qualification.

Quality SWL is *structured*

- It has a clearly articulated and documented purpose for all stakeholders, such as students achieving industry specified competencies.
- There are clearly identified and documented learning outcomes for students within accredited programs which are linked to post-school qualifications.
- It is of sufficient duration and depth to enable students to acquire a reasonable understanding of the enterprise/industry to demonstrate competence according to industry standards of at least level I of the Australian Qualifications Framework.
- There is a match between students' skills and interests and work placements.
- Students, teachers and employers are thoroughly prepared beforehand so that the expectations and outcomes of the work placement are clearly understood by all parties.

Quality SWL is *monitored*

- The learning is co-ordinated by personnel with appropriate expertise and adequate resources.
- Support should be made available to students and employers throughout all phases of the work placement, including pre- and post-placement stages.

Quality SWL is *regulated*

Students are required to understand the roles and responsibilities of employees in the workplace and are expected to follow the directions of the workplace supervisors and other appropriate employees. There are clearly stated procedures designed to ensure that students:

- are inducted into the workplace
- are protected from moral and physical danger
- work in a non-discriminatory and harassment free environment
- receive appropriate training and instruction in occupational health and safety
- are not being exploited by being continuously engaged in a production or service capacity or used as substitutes for the employment of employees and payment of appropriate wages

Quality SWL is *assessed*

- The assessment, according to industry standards, is of students' competencies achieved in the workplace which contributes to the overall assessment of the program.
- Assessment is carried out by qualified persons, who may or may not be the work placement supervisor.
- There are mechanisms for the recording and reporting of students' competencies.
- This study used these features as a guide for the research.

Aims of research

This research was undertaken to investigate current practices in school–small enterprise links to examine current literature in relation to SWL, to identify issues and common themes, to develop an integrated theoretical framework for SWL and to make suggestions regarding future directions. In particular, the research aimed to:

- identify the triggers that influence the opportunity for school–small enterprise structured workplace learning
- analyse the benefits of links between schools and small enterprises, including the reciprocal benefits to small enterprises and schools
- develop a theoretical and contextual framework for SWL in small enterprises
- document the developing links between small enterprises and schools, and the determinants for success of these relationships
- develop critical exemplars of 'good practice' in school–small enterprise SWL

This study on structured workplace learning is important for three main reasons. A recent review of literature on work placements found that, although the VET sector has traditionally had closer ties with workplaces than either schools or universities, the literature on work placements in the VET sector is curiously thin (Smith & Harris 2000, p.6). However, with the introduction of training packages which typically require delivery in actual workplaces for 'real world' learning and 'authentic' assessment, the demand for work placements in industries can be expected to continue increasing, and so issues relating to SWL need more and deeper research. Secondly, the literature that does exist tends to be mostly uncritical, discipline-related and focussed on administrative practicalities, and neglects more significant issues such as learning, cultural tensions, and roles and identities (Smith & Harris 2000, p. 32). It has very little to say, for example, about how links are initiated, maintained and enhanced between partners involved in SWL. From the learning perspective, we also know little about the relative strengths of alternative models and approaches to SWL, and how and by whom links are developed. Thirdly, a vast amount of the literature is framed from the perspective of educational institutions (Smith & Harris 2000, p. 32). There is a need therefore for more balance. In particular the perspectives of industry partners also need to be included in analyses of SWL.

The report summarises the findings from the literature review, from interviews with small enterprises and interviews with schools. It then develops three exemplars of 'good practice' and a theoretical framework, before concluding with some implications for future development.

Methodology

At the outset of the project a search was undertaken of relevant literature in the field of structured workplace learning, including theoretical texts from national and international sources, and examples of workplace learning applications in different contexts within Australia, Europe and North America. The findings from both the interviews and the literature search were integrated into the research findings and lead to the development of a theoretical framework for workplace learning.

A qualitative research approach was used because it enabled a variety of people associated with structured workplace learning in small enterprises to contribute information to facilitate an exploration of the research aims of the project. It also enabled different perspectives to be considered and encouraged the researchers to determine whether common understandings (or interpretations) of the relevant terms had been established. To ensure a breadth and richness of data, the study incorporated a range of data collection methods. The methods used were literature reviewing, individual interviews, small group interviews, critical incident analysis and feedback from stakeholders once the initial data were collected and analysed. The stakeholders were schools, young people, small enterprises and associated staff (such as workplace learning co-ordinators).

The research was conducted in small enterprises and schools in South Australia and New South Wales to ascertain both differences and similarities in approach to structured workplace learning, and the impact of public policy (through the public education system) in establishing effective partnerships between schools and small enterprises. At the request of National Centre for Vocational Education Research the study was limited to the metropolitan areas of Sydney and Adelaide.

In each State, four structured workplace learning programs which involved a government high school and small enterprise collaboration, were selected for the study on the recommendation of the respective education departments. Four schools were chosen in western Sydney, and two schools each in southern and northern Adelaide. All schools were considered by the respective education departments as having established good vocational education and training initiatives and were closely involved with small enterprises in preference to medium or large enterprises. A total of 41 students were interviewed, generally in small groups of three to five students. This method was chosen as the researchers considered that the young people would enrich each other's comments thereby providing a more comprehensive overview of what actually happens rather than if interviewed in isolation. In discussion the young people reported being more comfortable with their peers and more willing to discuss a broader range of issues than if they had been on their own.

A total of 18 staff who had major responsibility for vocational education and training in the schools or who were administering the particular VET program were individually interviewed. In addition, where possible, the principals of the schools participating in the study were also interviewed.

A much larger number of small enterprises were involved in the study. Once a structured workplace learning program involved with small enterprises was identified, the study attempted to interview a representative of each small enterprise. On most occasions the person responsible for the supervision of students on work placements was interviewed. A total of 26 small enterprise personnel were interviewed in several community organisations (for example, golf,

bowls and service) and across eight industry sectors—hospitality, retail, office management, finance, information technology, telecommunications, furniture construction and food preparation.

In two instances (one in each State) a regional VET-in-schools co-ordinator, who provided co-ordination for a cluster of schools, was also interviewed. The researchers believed it was important to collect data from an individual school and regional perspective, given that both were considered to be working toward similar outcomes.

From these interviews a discussion paper was developed that highlighted key issues. The discussion paper was circulated to many vocational education and training personnel in schools as well as to several personnel in small enterprises for comment and feedback to the researchers. A clear and brief proforma accompanied the discussion paper for practitioners' comments. Feedback from the discussion paper was integrated into the findings.

Data were analysed to identify 'critical exemplars' (Gibson 1997) of good practice in school–workplace learning in small enterprises. The concept of critical exemplars has been developed from recognised research techniques and is a useful approach to demonstrating examples of 'good practice'. Critical exemplars do not simply provide an illustration of practice: they frame the illustration 'critically' in the sense that they illuminate not only the art and science of that practice, but also the significance of that practice for the individuals and contexts in which they operate. Critical exemplars describe more than the technical aspects of practice: they also describe the interactions/relationships between those elements and how they constitute 'good practice'. They thus provide a description of the elements 'critical' to good practice in a given field.

The methodology allowed the researchers to develop a theoretical framework within which to ground the development of practices for school–small enterprise learning processes. The triangulation of data collection methods and sources provided a breadth of data from which to explore the research aims.

Literature review

This section summarises the review of the literature undertaken for this study.

A national and international literature search was undertaken of recent literature related to workplace learning projects in the context of vocational education and training (VET) in schools. While much literature related to school-based vocational education and training and structured workplace learning programs was identified, little describing relationships between VET and small enterprises other than as a site for students to complete a placement was found. As Ryan (1997), in reviewing the research literature on vocational education in schools, noted:

> *There is a substantial body of literature on vocational education in schools but, while extensive, it is characterised more by pamphlets, pronouncements, manifestos and ministerial statements than by research findings, even in the broadest sense of the term. However, sufficient material of substance exists to identify some firm conclusions and a range of emerging issues.* (Ryan 1997, p.3)

The two most recent literature reviews in this area are those on VET in schools by Malley et al. (2001) and on work placements by Smith and Harris (2000). The claim has been made that most of the expanding literature on VET in schools can be categorised as 'pronouncement, polemic or policy analysis', rather than empirically based research (Malley et al. 2001, p.161; Ryan 1997). The excellent review of the literature by Malley et al. (2001) does, however, make mention of a number of writings that focus more on research activity in this area (such as Cumming & Carbines 1997; Figgis 1998; Malley, Frigo & Robinson 1999; Misko 1998; Polesel et al. 1998a, 1998b; Spark 1998; Strickland 1998). While this literature concentrates on VET in schools in general, it does nevertheless refer to structured workplace learning, given that the majority of programs do have structured workplace learning embedded in them. Work placement, in fact, is the aspect of VET in schools that has been the subject of considerable recent empirical investigation (Figgis 1998; Malley, Frigo & Robinson 1999; Misko 1998; Spark 1998), and the consensus from these studies is that work placement represents the greatest challenge to implement, yet produces the most beneficial outcomes for students (Malley et al. 2001).

The review by Smith and Harris (2000) concludes that, while the literature on work placements is relatively extensive, it tends to be sector-specific, discipline-related, mostly uncritical and focussed on administrative practicalities to the relative neglect of deeper issues such as learning, cultural tensions, and roles and identities. It is also somewhat confused by the juxtapositioning of work placements—structured skill-based experiences related to particular subjects or modules—with more generic work experience and some tendency to confusion between work placements and general workplace training, and by different nomenclatures across the educational sectors. Moreover, the literature tends to be predominantly based on perceptual rather than empirical evidence and framed primarily from the perspective of the education provider.

In Australia by 1999, an estimated 86% of secondary schools were providing a broad range of vocational programs based on some form of school–industry partnership, with 80% also providing structured workplace learning for students as the basis of that partnership (Malley et al. 2001, p.32). McIntrye and Pithers (2001), in their analysis of statistics collected by ECEF on students involved in structured workplace learning, found 'a clear picture of an expanding program that is well-established in every State and Territory, reaching over 80 000 students in Year 11 and 12, in 75% of Australian secondary schools' (p.2).

One of the main strengths of the Australian VET in schools agenda is the widespread implementation of structured workplace learning, whereas one of the main weaknesses is

employer participation, which is relatively low and varies between regions and schools (Malley et al. 2001, pp.7–8). These authors claim that the challenge now facing vocational education provision in secondary schools is how to build upon the advances already achieved without extending the unevenness in provision already evident. What they recommend as being essential to this process is a co-ordinated and sustained program to increase employer participation in the various forms of vocational education (p.9). This participation could range from creating structured workplace learning positions within an enterprise, becoming a member of a management committee for either a school or regional/industry vocational program, or contacting vocational networks as a first step in any recruitment processes for young people (Malley et al. 2001, p.10).

Some of the perceived benefits of VET-in-Schools programs are succinctly summarised in Malley et al. (2001, pp.47–50)—for students, employers, teachers and schools. Many of these benefits are *ipso facto* dependent upon the implementation of structured workplace learning. Similarly, some of the key difficulties in implementing structured workplace learning are presented: they tend to relate to cost (the most significant contribution to the cost of delivery of a vocational program occurs when the program is designed to include such learning), integration with school timetabling (students having to catch up regular school work missed while in workplaces), and size of enterprises (larger businesses being able to participate more easily).

The review by Smith and Harris (2000) also highlights many critical challenges in work placements, such as resourcing, professional development, tensions between workplace and provider cultures, variations in quality of workplace learning environments and equity in access. The issue of quality in particular is underlined: work placements are very dependent on the calibre and orientation of the workplace mentor(s) and on the breadth and depth of experience possible in any particular workplace.

The literature reviewed in relation to structured workplace learning, in fact, identified a diversity of emerging issues. Roberts (1995) discusses mentoring as a methodology for small enterprises to combat youth unemployment and to ensure a greater take-up of small business careers by such young people. Childs (1997) builds on this approach by proposing learning partnerships where small enterprise work is seen as curriculum and all participants are learners who mutually benefit from pooling their competence and experience.

A strong cyclical impact in work-based entry-level training on trends in skill formation is identified by Lundberg (1997). He argues that during 'bearish' or recessionary phases of the business cycle there are sharp contractions in provision of opportunities for work-based entry-level training, which lead to substantial shortfalls in trained personnel during 'bullish' or improving phases of the business cycle. He calls for a method of providing increased government funding for work-based entry training, particularly at the earliest stages of a recessionary business cycle.

> *Apart from a focussed policy response, fully effective implementation of measures to secure work-based entry-level training against severe contractions, as recessions 'bite', may require development of improved statistical leading indicators. Improvements on past performance could, however, be made without improved leading indicators.* (Lundberg 1997, p.20)

Roberts (1995) adds to the work of Connell et al. *Making the difference* (1982) in finding cultural reproduction, particularly where school and family values match, to be evident but importantly for this research, he indicates an emerging role for workplace learning as an intervention strategy for working class youth who do not fit the system. Young people at risk within the education system may be more likely to find mentors (or a trusted adult) in the small business world where employers with matching backgrounds and lack of school success may be empathetic.

The career pathways approach of Cowan (1996) argues that business and educators should work together to help teachers bring workplace relevance to their classrooms and provide lessons developed by both. Bagnall (1996) takes this further in a research project on workplace learning within small enterprises in the field of tourism with an analysis of the nature and ethical implications of embeddedness (as education and training) in the workplace, arising from contemporary convergent influences.

Competencies within workplace knowledge are a feature of research by Beven (1996) to identify workplace skills and knowledge required by small enterprise owner–operators in the tourism–hospitality field. Middleton (1996) discusses the extent to which problem-solving competencies are generic and applicable to all workplace settings, while Kanes (1996) argues that generic competencies within workplace vocational knowledge are bound to specific contents. Cumming and Carbines (1997) claim that links between schools and business relating to the development of structured programs to enable young people to participate in the world of work are focussed primarily on the development of employment-related skills and an appreciation of contemporary business and industry.

The potential for community development (Cumming & Carbines 1997, Turner et al. 1995) to provide a wider content for workplace learning is gathering momentum. Sungaila (1994) suggests that 'education may no more be an individual or social investment. Education might just be for work and work for the economy'. Further, she argues that:

> *Narrow concern with work-related competencies might distract our attention from other precious knowledge and skills we educators believe students do need to acquire, not just for work, but for living. In addition, with such a strong focus on the post-compulsory phase of schooling, we might also be losing a balanced view of the whole process of schooling from the very first year to the twelfth. We might even be in danger of losing sight of the learner altogether. Possessed of their economic purpose, their efficiency and their rationality, our education and training systems demand that teacher and learner alike submit.* (Sungaila 1994, p.249)

Cumming and Carbines (1997) discuss connections and relationships established between schools and their communities and argue that such projects have a potential to influence the wider context of community development, and on a much larger scale. They argue:

> *As part of this bigger picture, outcomes are regarded as extending beyond the individuals involved, to incorporate gains such as social, economic and environmental improvement. The studies (e.g. Junee 2003 Project) reported a general perception that effective school–community links had an unlimited capacity to energise or re-invigorate local municipalities, towns, cities and regions.*
> (Cumming & Carbines 1997, p.23)

Bringing the community into the school, authenticating learning environments beyond the school and generating new forms of partnerships will require ongoing school reform.

Morrow (1996) claims that, when schools connect their students to the world of work, their traditional functions to care for the students and to provide them with a framework of values that are shared in society, are not replaced. Perhaps the notion of lifelong learning is now a necessity in the workforce. For as Resnick from the University of Pittsburgh's 'New Standards Project' comments, for the first time in our educational history, there is a convergence between the things we need for more effective democracies, for economic development and for personal fulfillment (quoted in Morrow 1996).

The literature clearly reveals that students on placement are in an ambiguous situation (Smith & Harris 2000, p.22). The student resembles a migrant adolescent growing up in two worlds, or a traveller in a foreign country, where one leaves the familiarity of one environment (the provider) and journeys into a less familiar context (the workplace) with a mix of apprehension of the relative unknown and a desire to learn. In this situation, role and identity can be ambiguous and problematic, for the individual is essentially a 'visitor'—in the enterprise but not of it. Is he/she a learner or a cheap source of labour, a temporary junior or a potentially future employee? At times the relationship may also resemble a courtship, in which employer and student are checking each other out in terms of a possible future relationship (employment)—a case of 'trying before buying' for both parties.

Certainly the setting in the workplace is significantly different from that of the school environment. For many, this involves their first experience of working with other people of various ages, experience and status within an organisation. 'These experiences have the potential to enhance maturity and to broaden the young person's learning techniques as they begin to see themselves as a member of an adult group with adult roles and responsibilities' (Hull 1999, p.14).

The literature review did not uncover a significant amount of material in relation to small enterprises and structured workplace learning; however, it did identify a range of references that add further issues to be discussed.

Morgan (1994) articulates that the chief concern of small enterprises is to re-cycle their current workforce and not to participate in school-to-work transition programs. Employers cite the lack of appropriate screening, the need for greater application of skills required by employers and the need for greater flexibility to improve the incentive to study for non-college-based students. Morgan finds that employers praise the quality and contributions of young workers and suggests that, to encourage employers to participate in school-to-work transitions, they focus national attention by investing in work; by being more flexible; by making the youth labour market itself more supportive of young people's ambitions; and by persuading schools to focus on work readiness.

Thompson (1992) states that small business owners consider that a simple key competency framework would be useful to small businesses in selecting new employees. Investigation of the communications and mathematics competencies needed to comply with work-related legislation indicated that levels required to understand and act appropriately were high. The study found some small business managers functioned with much lower levels. Two broad approaches are recommended to reduce this perceived skills gap—training and servicing.

Childs (1997), and to a lesser extent Kelleher and Murray (1996), refer to action learning as another response to what small enterprises need in workplace learning. Childs suggests a very different view of curriculum from that defined by schools and points to a much more challenging and potentially rewarding model that would require a closer relationship between school and the workplace. In working with small enterprises, Childs suggests that educators manage contradictions, acknowledge and work with the individual cultures, communication practices and structures of each small business, and recognise trends across small business industries, communities and regions.

She also discusses a Certificate III in Business New Enterprise Formation that uses action learning as a basis for enterprise development. The certificate is action-based rather than curriculum-based learning and builds in small business real time and real contexts as an implicit rather than accidental philosophy of the learning program. The certificate is the first of its kind in Australia and creatively interprets national qualification standards.

In relation to workplace learning programs initiated by schools for senior secondary students, North America has the most experience (70 years is claimed). Student worksite learning experiences, as they call them in California, range across most industries leading into internships that are more career-pathway-oriented. Of interest to this project is the Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning (REAL) program, which links small business curriculum studies to small enterprises leading to small business start-up projects operated by students. Unfortunately, no small business input was collated or discussed.

The community college system is also well-documented. Although similar to the Australian TAFE system, it is specifically designed to integrate with the end of schooling and therefore provides targetted vocational training legitimised by workplace learning to a large cohort of American youth. Again, evaluative material tends to focus on measuring student performance in college study programs, before and after industry-based experience, with overall positive effects generally observed (North Carolina State Department of Community Colleges 1995). The community college system also provides an important nurturing focus for small enterprises (for example, Small Business Centre Network at North Carolina), thus providing a ready-made resource for workplace learning programs. Student involvement in community-based learning programs are also a feature (Vo 1996) of leading-edge vocational programs, with service and civic entrepreneurship being openly encouraged and valued.

Tech Prep education is a significant innovation in the education reform movement in the United States. It involves a planned sequence of study in a technical field beginning as early as the ninth year of school. The sequence extends through two years of post-secondary occupational education or an apprenticeship program of at least two years following secondary instruction,

and culminates in an associate degree or certificate. Tech Prep is an important strategy helping students make the connection between school and employment (US Department of Education 2001). Such programs are common in the USA (for example, Raber & Menchlinsky 1995) with significant industry links, although little employer evaluation is documented.

The Canadian experience follows similar trends (Anisef & Axelrod 1993). Although there seems to be more concern and identification of differences amongst young people and the consequent need to pay closer attention to the multiple transitions that young adults encounter in their journey from school to work, more attention is paid to issues of gender, socioeconomic status, ethnocultural origin and region. Student experience in the workplace can start very early as in the 'Take Our Kids to Work' program run in Toronto that targets Year 8 and 9 students. However, senior secondary arrangements seem to be modelled quite closely on those over the border.

In Australia, the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF), now the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF), has published a variety of descriptions of school–industry programs (for example, Ainley & Fleming 1997). Athanasou discusses the Australian experience:

> *School-based cooperative vocational education in Australia is of recent origin and no more than about six years old. It involves structured school and work programs that allow students to learn in occupations related to a field of study and attend school during the same time period. This combination of school and work has evolved:*
>
> - *in response to significant changes in the efforts of students completing secondary schooling*
> - *as an attempt to foster experiential learning*
> - *to help young people learn specific skills and knowledge related to their course work; and*
> - *to assist them in order to qualify for a full-time job or further education.*
>
> (Athanasou 1996, p.4)

He also recognises that there are two noticeable differences between Australian school-based vocational programs and those from overseas. Australian students attend workplaces voluntarily and they are able to access dual accreditation (that is, state secondary certificates for completing high school and industry-specific training qualifications).

The MCEETYA (2000) *New framework for vocational education in schools* points out 'the profound change in the nature of work' (p.12) in Australia, and recognises the need to form a new definition of structured workplace learning by increasing co-ordination between schools, TAFE and employers. However, it justifies a call for increased centralisation of the scheme by stressing the need for 'effective implementation in the various jurisdictions' (p.16). Although the co-ordination of structured workplace learning is seen as joint responsibility between school and community, the report's emphasis is less on developing practical implementation than on building a supportive systematic infrastructure.

However, in a more pragmatic approach to structured workplace learning, *The quest for a working blueprint* (Malley et al. 2001) report recognises that, although 'structured workplace learning has become widespread', associated funding and resourcing responsibilities remain unresolved. While admitting the traditional separation and the complexity of community/State/Commonwealth relationships, the report identifies the need for a national entry-level vocational qualification in the form of a school leaving certificate with generic competencies, and emphasises the importance of employer participation through structured workplace learning within the process. It also stresses the significance of taking too long to deliver an acceptable scheme of structured workplace learning, given the rate of change in the workplace.

The report considers that the consolidation of applied learning and the extension of its availability to students through various partnership agreements that may or may not include structured workplace learning is 'an ambitious project still in its fledgling stage', given very real problems in the areas of funding and future staffing, and the fact that the whole concept is still evolving in practical terms. It points to the Commonwealth Government as the body that should be addressing the issues of a lack of trained teachers/co-ordinators in the structured workplace learning field, along with the problematic situation of the extra expense incurred in setting up structured workplace learning programs, especially in smaller schools and remote areas.

The ECEF-published report, *Witnessing evolution* (Malley, Ainley & Robinson 2001), uses statistical analysis to justify an argument for the expansion of structured workplace learning. It does, however, warn of a 'blurring of purpose' (p.12) in that the promotion of structured workplace learning is overlapping, and in some cases clashing with other educational reforms. It points out that, while the major focus of the school–industry nexus is still the school, this 'may not be leading a major shift in the restructuring of general education' (p.24). ECEF targets another area of general concern to structured workplace learning commentators when it notes that employers are 'willing to provide work placements but ... less willing to extend involvement to management committees or planning and implementation activities' (p.29). In the light of the scheme's dependence on employers as a major stakeholding body, this seems crucial to the success or failure of structured workplace learning as a transition mechanism.

This lack of deep involvement by employers is also noted by McKenzie (2001) who, along with identifying 28 gaps in structured workplace learning research, suggests that a possible reason for employers' lack of enthusiasm is their reaction to the role taken by the schools' administration. He considers that the evidence shows a lack of preparation of the participating students, and frequent difficulties with contact by employers with the relevant personnel within the schools.

McKenzie also foreshadows ideological problems with the continuation of structured workplace learning because of the clash between its implicit philosophies and those explicit in mainstream education. He notes that the practice of structured workplace learning is not inclusive in its nature because it does not cater for a wide range of learning styles, and suggests that this is partly due to 'divisions between researchers and practitioners' (p.6). He also questions the directions taken by structured workplace learning authorities in that there appears to be 'litt[illegible]elationship between the program and labour market opportunities' (p.6).

Fullarton (1999) for the Australian Council of Educational Research expands on this issue in noting that 'if ... workplace learning programs do not ... lead to strong labour market outcomes, equity concerns may be raised' (p.13). She continues with an examination of the practice of structured workplace learning and notes that 'assessing the outcomes of workplace learning programs is problematic' (p.18).

The Commonwealth Senate's committee report, *Aspiring to excellence* (Senate 2000) investigated the quality of vocational education and training in Australia. It is of note that the report makes no mention of structured workplace learning. It does, however, comment on general problems being experienced within the school–industry transition zone. It echoes the concerns of ECEF about the need for employers within the scheme to participate fully, and supports McKenzie's observations in that 'the development of skills ... to meet the demands of the new labour market ... is a challenge that has largely been unmet' (p.6). The report suggests that this may be due, in part, to the fragmentation of the program and 'the failure of current arrangements to develop a national system' (p.10).

In relation to vocational education and training and small business, the literature reveals that small enterprises are regularly surveyed and contacted by telephone regarding their VET needs (see Muraski & Whiteman [1991] for a United States example, or Baker [1995] for the Australian experience). While it is apparent that lists of needs are produced and the demand and supply of VET is recognised, little seems to change.

Wyatt and Rush-Matthews (1996) point to the need for more substantial and detailed research to enable a clearer picture of small and medium enterprise (SME) demand for training. They also illustrate the lack of sensitivity to SME needs shown by training providers. Smith et al. (1996) agree that there is little industry-specific knowledge of SME training needs and that there will be wide variance in the requests for support depending on industry, economic cycle and individual SME age and development criteria. Harris et al. (1998) confirm the very different goals of small enterprises and educational institutions, while pointing to the need for publicly funded VET institutions to build closer partnerships with small business.

Bone and Hargreaves (2001) provide an up-to-date account of a range of school–work programs from Australia and overseas. They are examined to identify their components and to reveal, in particular any information on good practice in case management. While the emphasis is

specifically on school-to-work programs, their report provides useful case studies as well as extracting from the literature a helpful list of what they label 'implementation pitfalls' that include ownership, partnership, adequate skills base, adequate financial resources, adequate education for employers and strategies to fit local conditions.

Future skills and anticipated trends are commonly reported and collated (Firebrace 1995), but communication with small enterprises remains problematic. Calls for further research and more detailed industry-specific research are all too common (Callus 1994). Gibb (1997) neatly summarises most Australian research in this area, confirming trends recognised above, including the overall importance of informal training and general lack of workplace-based training in small enterprises. She also points to new federal government initiatives that claim to make entry-level training easier for small business (that is, new apprenticeships).

The Karpin report (1995) provided an overview of literature since the 1980s, describing why small business is resistant to training and the failure of training providers to meet its needs. Amongst the reasons were the fact that training programs were too general and not targetted to small enterprise needs, small enterprise lacked conviction that training was useful, and the usual issues of time, quality of training and cost (Gibb 1997).

There is some evidence (Baker 1995; Wyatt & Rush-Matthews 1996) that, from the perspective of small business the National Training Reform Agenda in Australia has further complicated an already complex VET menu, leading to reduced take-up rates of training.

The American literature dedicates more space to the concept of partnerships between small enterprises and VET providers (including schools). For example, Dykman (1996) claims that there is still a need for the system to justify itself. Through the first half of this century, Plato's model sufficiently served students and the economy; the majority had little need for much learning, merely a strong back and know-how to follow orders. However, that is not the case today. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that by 2000 only 15% of the workforce would be unskilled and 65% would need to be skilled, with still only 20% who would enter professional careers. These statistics demand a vastly different educational system than that of 1950, when at least 60% of jobs were unskilled and only 20% were skilled (Dykman 1996).

She goes on to discuss that partners who plan, develop and implement work-based learning strategies should look to the goals of providing:

- relevance and meaning to learning experiences
- hands-on application
- contexture and integrated learning experiences
- connections between school and work
- career awareness and exploration
- relevant employability skills and what employers want
- specific career preparation and skills of the job
- dignity to practical learning, application of knowledge and work

She also refers to specific contributions that organisations can make to the education system. These include:

- effecting change
- improving student achievement and self-esteem
- enhancing instructional support
- enriching the learning environment
- promoting career awareness
- providing resources
- strengthening school–community relations

The American literature also discusses the *School-to-work opportunities act* of 1994 which outlines a system of workforce development emphasising partnerships between schools and business and the integration of academic and vocational education.

In California, a resultant School-to-Career Plan had several implications for US community colleges, including that colleges be required to enter into partnerships with business, labour, and other educational segments to implement the plan, and that business be given an important role in developing curricula, which may abridge faculty rights.

In Virginia, the program prepares students to be 'career investigators'. They complete an in-depth study of one to four career clusters, and eventually match their interests and aptitudes with occupational information, investigate a variety of pathways to career success, and reinforce the skills and knowledge needed for paid employment. Wacker (1995) argues that educators, parents, employers, and community members must help students become future-directed. In Montana, students and small business work together to provide tangible benefits for their partnership. Students form a close link with businesses by conducting computer software training for their staffs using school equipment and facilities. Students also actively recruit speakers from the business community to address the school. Other writers have discussed arrangements that exist in other parts of the United States (for example, Rouse 1995 in Texas; Adkisson & Lane 1995 introduce career maps as the missing implementation theme of Iowa's school-to-work program; Schoelkopf 1996 in Oregon).

Theders (1994) asserts that if all the small businesses in the United States were considered together, they would constitute the third largest employer in the world. Thus the need for education to supply the workforce for these enterprises looms particularly large. America is a conglomeration of thousands of communities made up of small businesses and individuals. The future welfare of those communities is linked to the ability of these small businesses to flourish, and their future growth depends on a well-prepared local workforce. The circle cannot complete itself without a strong education component at the local level that connects education to the world of work in the community and focusses on the successful transition of students from school to work in the small businesses of that community.

Further, he claims that smaller is better because of the personal attention a small business owner can give a student (and a school), the more individualised training a student receives in small business and the extended family atmosphere that exists rather than the impersonal climate of a large business. He also reports on the advantages to business; for example, that it is a way to screen potential employees the added productivity to the business and the ingraining of a work ethic. He supports paying students for their work placement because paying the student worker establishes a professional relationship between employer and employee, whereas an unpaid student may think and behave like a volunteer and take on less responsibility. A paid student realises he or she must earn wages by performing as a productive member of the staff.

A case study of an Australian example is that of Patterson (1992). The study emphasises two points of focus: credit transfer arrangements for Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) advice programs and identification of the need for work education and careers advice programs in Years 7–10 to ensure that the full range of post-school pathways is understood. In support of this focus the Taskforce on Pathways in Education and Training (1992) concluded that, despite some co-operative arrangements, the sectors of our education and training system operate too much as separate worlds. That separateness coupled with some industrial, cultural and financial rigidities, means that valuable community resources are under-utilised. Change is needed within the sectors as well.

Creating or facilitating work-based learning experiences requires vocational educators to form partnerships with people and institutions outside their program—particularly with employers and local business groups, labor organisations and some community groups (Harvey 1984). The approaches suggested include co-operative education agreements between schools and employers, youth apprenticeships (paid), employer mentoring, integration of work-based and school-based learning, and integration of academic and vocational learning.

The recent OECD report, *From initial education to working life: Making transitions work* (2000), covering 14 member countries concluded that widespread opportunities for young people to combine workplace experience with their education was one of the six key features of successful transition systems. Sweet (2001) reports that such workplace experience can be obtained in many different ways, and while apprenticeship is the best-known and one of the most successful of these, transference of ideas from other countries—in this case, Germany and Switzerland—remains problematic. Thus many countries have experimented with school-organised forms of structured workplace experience. However,

> *The international evidence on the success of these—from countries such as Canada, the United States and Sweden—suggests that the jury remains out, even though young people find them very rewarding. Quality remains a key problem everywhere, including Australia. There is considerable variability in real employer involvement, in acceptance by schools, in assessment practices, and in curriculum coherence.* (Sweet 2001, p.12)

In seeking a way forward for Australia, therefore, two of his five key directions are to strengthen the quality of structured work placements, and to continue to build strong links between schools and employers, not just for workplace learning but also for recruitment and careers advice (p.13).

Although some authors comment on the variability of employer involvement, it would seem that those who do participate are largely positive about the experience. A survey by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation of 2000 employers 'demonstrated highly positive attitudes to the recent emergence of structured workplace learning programs. These benefits included improving the personal satisfaction of staff, community recognition, effective recruitment, and increasing productivity' (Colley 2000, p.49).

An important catalyst in fostering such links is the workplace learning co-ordinator. Partly because of differences in cultures and partly because of the newness of the skills required for the position, the role played by such people is not well understood, publicised or appreciated (Colley 2000, p.48). Colley vividly portrays their position as being like fish with bicycles, amphibious mammals between two quite different environments, who need to employ core skills quite different from traditional teaching skills. These include:

- liaising with employers—negotiating, persuading, advocating for employer and community participation in their programs
- marketing their programs
- co-ordinating and servicing community-based committees
- negotiating access to business and community facilities
- guiding employees in basic teaching and assessment techniques
- co-ordinating students on work placements
- often having responsibility for financial and administrative arrangements
- in some circumstances, managing employment-related functions for their programs, making students 'job ready', advising students on employment options and brokering job requests from employers

In summary, 'the core capabilities are "soft" skills—making connections, brokering, networking, linking, forging alliances, managing relationships' (Colley 2000, p.48).

A view from the industry perspective is provided by Campbell (1999). She quotes one of the Mitsubishi Motors Australia Ltd. managers as saying that one of the benefits to the company in participating in joint ventures with education is:

> *... the growth and personal development of our own participating employees. By becoming involved as program supervisors/mentors, our staff have an excellent opportunity to develop such important skills as: coaching and mentoring, planning and organising workloads, communication and public speaking.* (Campbell 1999, p.29)

As a consequence, the manager's judgement is that in their applying those acquired skills in the broader work situation and in their interaction with co-workers, the employees are able to contribute more effectively to their departments and the company overall.

The literature review by Smith and Harris (2000, p.34) found much of the literature on work placements predicated on a number of commonly-held assumptions:

- that work placements are inherently worthwhile
- that all workplaces are equally effective sites for learning
- that workplaces are equal sites of learning compared with educational providers
- that key players involved in work placements are wholeheartedly committed to, and adequately equipped for promoting student learning
- that the learning that takes place is meaningful to students and can be integrated with learning that takes place in their educational institution
- that costs are of minimal concern
- that there is no problem relating to the number of workplaces available and accessible for placements.

However, the literature is not always in accord on these matters. They are contested areas for further research, and none of the above assumptions is totally justified. There are many factors that impinge on the organisation and effectiveness of structured workplace learning and many issues that need to be carefully considered in its planning, design and implementation.

There are two key areas of contestation. One is the nature of the workplace: is it oppressive and exploitative (the less common assumption) or is it a benign place where learning happens all the time (the more common assumption)? The second is the nature of the learning: what learning is desired, what actually is learned and how does one know? Emerging from these two contestable areas is the critical issue of roles, particularly of the learner, but also of the provider and the workplace 'mentor' or 'supervisor'. While pockets of the literature address one or other of these aspects, there is little agreement and many gaps are left untouched. This state of affairs points to the need for a great depth of research in this area.

From the study of work placement literature and practice (Smith & Harris 2000), quality appears to be a major issue. In particular, quality of the student learning experiences and quality in assessment practices are two key areas. However, these are very difficult areas when schools and other providers have little or no control over what employers/workplaces do, nor over skills of workplace mentors. As Hughes, Moore and Bailey (1999) put it: 'Poor placements can lead to dismal, miseducative experiences, but quality work-based learning can provide benefits above and beyond what students get even in excellent classrooms' (p.37).

Specific strategies have been suggested from research studies to improve the provision and quality of workplace learning programs (Figgis 1998; Misko 1998; Strickland 1998). Malley et al. (2001, p.45) summarise these as follows:

- involvement of employers in the selection process
- encouragement of schools to better prepare students—trying to ensure that students create the right impression, through appropriate personal presentation and attitude, and with students visiting employers prior to placement
- schools giving greater attention to support and training protocols (for instance, so that all employers have the option of one information session per year)
- implementation of minimum standards in relation to employer contacts in terms of timing, frequency of visits, and post-placement follow-ups, particularly providing feedback to employers on how useful the placement has been for the student
- improvement of information flow to employers, through processes such as regional newsletters
- enhancement of consultation between schools and industry regarding assessment, with logbooks to be reviewed annually for relevance and effectiveness

- encouraging schools to publicly recognise the goodwill and contribution of employers and supervisors

This literature review provides an analysis of the reasons why some small enterprises and educational settings attempt to form partnerships to improve opportunities for young people and themselves. Essentially the following key themes emerge from the literature review:

- mentoring
- cyclical impacts of small enterprises
- career pathways, workplace competencies
- community development
- examples of work placements
- roles (of students, school co-ordinators and enterprise staff)
- extent of employer involvement
- the contested nature of 'workplace' and 'learning'

Throughout this review, numerous perceived benefits and difficulties are highlighted and issues relating to the implementation of structured workplace learning underlined. A key thread running through the discussion is quality—of learning, of assessment and of program administration. The review also points to the need for further investigation into partnerships between small enterprises and schools. This is the focus of the present study.

Summary of interviews with small enterprises

The following is the researchers' summary of the data collected from personnel from small enterprises. The major issues raised by them are highlighted as key themes with industry sectors identified in the discussion of each theme. Once the schools in the two States were identified, the small enterprise employers participating in delivering structured workplace learning to the students were interviewed. The range of small enterprises included hospitality, retail, office management, finance, information technology, telecommunications, clubs (for example, golf, bowls, service), furniture construction and food preparation. This section provides a summary of the key themes that emerged from these interviews with the small enterprise employers.

Understanding of SWL

- The pressure of 'time' and the 'inability to have worthwhile dialogue' with schools and employer associations (hospitality, telecommunications, IT, furniture construction) were the main reasons proposed for why small enterprises were unsure of actually what defines structured workplace learning. Most employers had a basic understanding of the vocational education components. Furthermore, if student log books were either too generic or not related sufficiently to the workplace, they were prepared to adjust the program accordingly (hospitality, retail, finance, office management).
- The absence of a common working definition across small enterprises and schools constrains the transition from conventional work experience (where there is commonly no formal relationship with curriculum) to structured work placements where workplace competencies are assessed. Small enterprises preferred an arrangement whereby workplace competencies and school curriculum are more integrated and structured (hospitality, finance). However, they believed that schools continued to use work placements for work exposure, time out and respite for staff with minimal liaison between the school and the workplace (hospitality, finance, clubs).
- In discussion with small enterprises, there was a feeling that VET co-ordinators in schools assumed they fully understood the training system, when in fact they did not. Often (clubs, retail) the school personnel were increasing their understanding.
- What has become evident from the research is the need to encourage regular dialogue between education, training providers and small enterprises. In addition, schools or systems may need to devote more time to developing materials with small employers for the work placement before students commence their placement.

Understanding of reforms associated with the Australian training system

- While there is a considerable wealth of information available about the Australian training system, most small enterprises do not have the time to digest it fully or understand their place in it. A typical comment which sums up the feelings of the employers interviewed is:

  You've got other people like me who know what's going on or are slowly learning what's going on—I was totally ignorant, really, before. I still have a lot to learn. A lot of employers don't understand the intricacies of vocational education and training, that it's now linked to school curriculum, you know.

  (Representative from hospitality)

The pressure of operations and customer service as a small enterprise is a higher priority than training and learning about changes to the Australian training system. A general feeling of those interviewed was the lack of adequate information provided to small enterprises which would encourage them to learn more and participate in preparing other people for employment opportunities in small enterprises.

Characteristics required by the students

Small enterprises reported that the characteristics they were looking for in students included:

- 'a willingness to learn' (all)
- 'commitment' (service, hospitality, retail)
- 'a responsible attitude' (hospitality, finance, service)
- 'motivation' (all)
- 'problem-solving and co-operation' (hospitality)
- 'open and observing mind' (service, finance)
- 'a strong sense of personal integrity' (service)
- 'wanting to be there, showing initiative and asking questions' (retail, hospitality)
- 'being prepared to work' (all)

Other aspects that employers commented on included:

- knowledge of what work is like (for example, what happens in the workplace)
- knowledge of what the job consists of (for example, a description of the tasks without practical experience)
- knowledge of 'what they are in for', what will be required from the employer (for example, timeliness, length of the day routines, structured work schedules)
- working in groups and teams, independence and responsibility
- confidence in doing things well

Employers expressed a willingness to support students in work placements but articulated their desire for students to be prepared for the opportunity thoroughly. A quiet, shy approach to the placements was seen as the student not knowing why they were there, while an inquisitive 'how can I help' approach was looked upon favourably. The characteristics expressed by employers support the notion of structure at the work placement for the student and encourages students to get involved and find out what happens at particular small enterprises.

Learning on the job

While employers acknowledge 'the time students are in the workplace limits how much they learn, as does the level of skill they bring to the job initially' (hospitality, retail, finance), they are quick to point out that students 'are successful when they want to learn' (hospitality), 'come with a positive attitude' (service, finance), 'listen clearly to instructions' (furniture construction) and 'enjoy their work' (service). Small enterprises view a positive outlook and a willingness to try new things as fundamental attitudes the students need to bring to the workplace.

Length of time of structured work placements

Work experience programs that date back to the 1970s have traditionally been a one-week experience. Structured work placement programs enabled a variety of combinations. In some instances (service), five-day blocks as opposed to extended placements (nine afternoons over nine weeks) were the preferred option, simply because of the need for continuity. Block placements

were generally seen as more efficient in terms of time and resources (service, hospitality), 'getting a better understanding of the industry' (service), 'having an opportunity to apply new skills (for example, turf maintenance, handling food, OHS&W issues) at the workplace' (service, hospitality, furniture construction), and 'you can take time out to show them' the work you want completed (hospitality).

Employers commented it was important in the negotiations with school personnel to suggest or recommend the most appropriate length of time for the work placement—one which would meet their needs as well as those of students. They thought there would not be one preferred model but that individual small enterprises would respond as best they could.

Most employers interviewed agreed with the comment that 'more dialogue with employers about the content of the workplace learning program would improve links between the school[s] and [small] enterprises' (hospitality).

Benefits for small enterprises

The benefits for the small enterprises included:

- 'a recruitment tool' (hospitality, retail, service)
- 'a sense of community obligation because many kids miss out' (hospitality, service, IT, furniture construction)
- employers got 'a free look at potential employees' (service)
- 'students take some of the strain from the day to day workload' (hospitality, service)
- great 'to have an extra pair of hands' (hospitality)

Other employers who had experienced 'difficult personal experiences of their own, felt empathy for the students' situations and were keen to help out where they could' (service, hospitality, retail, finance).

Despite the time constraints that small enterprises face daily, employers consider that it is worth the effort to provide support to students who are motivated and willing to learn new things. A student who responds to advice and directions was often seen as a great asset with some part-time paid employment (service, hospitality) often being offered to students who performed above expectations.

Benefits for students through participation in SWL

All employers interviewed responded positively about the benefits for students. Comments included:

- 'hands on experience' (hospitality, retail, food preparation)
- 'exposure to new work' (finance, telecommunications, IT)
- 'experience of real life in the world of work' (all)
- 'understanding of the need for punctuality' (service, hospitality)
- 'responsibility that comes from working in teams situation realised' (retail, office, service)
- 'improvements in attitude toward work and achieving goals' (service, food preparation)
- 'an increased realisation that independence is important in the workplace' (service, retail) as workers are not always totally supervised

In fact, in most small enterprises in this study, a great deal of the daily work was successfully completed unsupervised (furniture construction, food preparation). Other comments included 'an insight and knowledge of what they are going to expect when they get into a position of their own' (hospitality), and 'exposing students to various tasks associated with whatever it is they are learning' (finance).

Continued participation in SWL programs

Most employers indicated that, despite their limited understanding of the Australian training system (in particular structured work placements) and their belief that benefits mostly flowed to students and schools, they were prepared to continue with work placement programs. Their reasons for continuing were varied. Some (service, finance, furniture construction) said that because they had children of their own they were keen to help young people in general. Others (hospitality) considered that the students were often enthusiastic and keen 'to have a go'. Other employers (retail) said they saw it as a sign of being a good 'corporate citizen' and that this was important nowadays. For an employer in the finance sector, with an established training centre for staff, continuation of the centre and the structured workplace programs were imperative for the culling and recruiting of future staff.

Greater involvement in SWL

Most small enterprise representatives claimed that greater involvement by them in the establishment and planning of structured workplace learning would be of benefit (subject to time constraints), although the advantage was seen to be mostly to the student or school. Some (particularly in hospitality and service) have been very involved and have spent a great deal of time working with the school to establish work placement criteria for the student. One comment included:

> *Personally, yes I would like to be more involved because I see students feeling a little bit of self-confidence in their knowledge ... confidence to do it ... self-belief and a little bit of pride.*
>
> (Representative from finance)

Employers also commented on their potential greater involvement from a 'negative' viewpoint. Examples of comments in this vein included:

> *We've never had any feedback from the school and that makes you feel a little despondent ... we're putting ourselves out for the students and getting nothing back.* (Representative from hospitality)
>
> *... teachers should drop in ... so the students would see the link between what we do and what happens at school.* (Representative from service, finance)
>
> *... not specific enough for the job they will do in the business.* (Representative from retail)
>
> *... what we normally do is cross out all the garbage and write in what we really did ... the assessment should be open-ended rather than a list of tasks and skills.* (Representative from hospitality)
>
> *... we should be more involved in designing the assessment forms.*
>
> (Representative from retail, service, finance)

The general tone of the interviews was a reflection of how small enterprises could be taken seriously if they attempted to contribute to a process of shared learning and teaching. All small enterprises commented on the need 'for more structured feedback' to them about the placements and the assessed progress of the students. There was a strong feeling on the part of small enterprise representatives that the process was too much one way.

Summary

Small enterprises view the Australian training system as too complex to enable them to be openly involved on a regular, ongoing basis. They rely on their established networks for information and view their priority as devoting time to ensure their enterprise survives into the future. While they appreciate that they have a role to play in supporting young people they believe the current system of work placements benefits the students and school more than it does their enterprise. The arrangements for structured work placements are generally put in place from the school perspective with little feedback to the employer. Employers clearly want to understand training packages and the assessment requirements used to test whether students are 'competent'. They

believe that current log book requirements are time-consuming and cumbersome. They also believe they need more constructive feedback from schools and students to determine whether their contribution is valued and worthwhile.

Employers are prepared to negotiate the length of structured work placements but believe their constraints (for example, time, time of the year and so on) should be considered before the needs of the school. Employers also believe that students should be visited more often by school personnel and that students should report back what they have learnt and offer ideas for improvements. A strong sense of a partnership between employer and school has been evident in the interviews with small enterprise representatives.

Summary of interviews in schools

The researchers consulted with two different sets of respondents within the eight participating schools in New South Wales and South Australia. Students were interviewed in small groups to facilitate open dialogue and to encourage them to value add each other's comments. School administrators (for example principals, vocational education and training co-ordinators, both regional and school-based) were interviewed individually. A range of themes emerged from the research and the following is a summary of the findings from the school perspective.

Strong interest in VET

- School administrators in both States strongly believed in vocational education programs and were keen to take up any new opportunities for increasing their students' exposure to vocational options and structured work placements directly relevant to their students' courses. Generally, school personnel were supportive of vocational education and training and believe structured workplace learning components are particularly valuable as a means of linking the students with potential local employers for later employment.
- The school administrators in both States believed that the practical application of knowledge is very important and that vocational education and training is providing that opportunity for students. They see structured workplace learning as bringing together the experience a student needs to apply knowledge to real life situations. The schools promote to the community the variety of opportunities that VET provides to their students and encourages the community to respond by working in partnership with them to provide the practical application components of their courses.

Impact of the introduction of VET in schools

- Vocational education and training is having a significant impact in schools. While much of it has been positive, concerns have also been evinced. Administrators in both States indicated 'change in schools was shufflingly slow, with the existence of real structural impediments to change'. It is perceived, by vocational co-ordinators, that influencing change in the school is difficult and dependant on building a relationship with those who control the decision-making. Senior school personnel responsible for staffing see 'staff movements [transfers] were causing instability and continuity problems in getting the cultural change occurring'. This was particularly evident in traditional, conservative schools who saw their role more clearly focussed on academic pursuits.
- The professional development of teaching staff was seen by school personnel in both States to be crucial to the continued development of VET in schools. However, according to vocational co-ordinators the financial resources to generate the professional training are lacking. They see professional development funding as the means to expand the capacity of teachers to work in the new VET arrangements. Without the resources they find it difficult to complete their work with a high degree of satisfaction.
- Administrators of schools are acutely aware that teachers need to be in the small enterprises, and staff from small enterprises need to be in schools, more often to develop a partnership approach and understand each other's perspectives of what student learning is occurring, and needs to occur. While schools have a tendency to see small enterprises as a resource to be

utilised, administrators argue that a learning partnership, valued by the school, small enterprise and community is what they are working towards. The sense of a partnership is expressed by students, employers and school personnel as the preferred way forward. Students are stronger in their opinion that the practical application of their learning at school into the workplace helps them find their place in the workforce.

- The VET in schools approach in both States, indicated by the schools involved in this research, is based upon a cluster approach rather than one based on individual schools developing a relationship with each small enterprise. In most examples, schools viewed clusters as 'advancing the culture changes' more successfully and acting as a filter for 'growth, development, accountability and change follow-up'. The cluster approach was viewed by schools as producing a far better outcome in relation to available places for work placements.
- While some schools saw the VET in schools initiatives as 'a flash in the pan political agenda', others saw it as a genuine push to improve the training and education of young people. Schools have not embraced preparing young people for work as core business but, business understood the increasing pressure from employers and students for learning to be more relevant to their lives and work aspirations. In both New South Wales and South Australia most schools now have established vocational programs with vocational colleges in high school settings.

In one State the feelings went even stronger with comments such as:

> *... there is experiential growth of opportunity ... learning is occurring between enterprises and yourselves and that learning isn't feeding back into the culture of schools.*
>
> *... there is still a degree of suspicion of teachers as the academics.*
>
> *... what mall enterprises want is much more the partnership.*
>
> *... it is about changing their [the schools'] culture.*

SWL different from work experience

Both school administrators and students generally agree that structured workplace learning is far better than the (older) notions of work experience. Students' comments reflected the greater breadth and depth of the learning that a structured experience affords:

> *... at school you learn a lot of different ways to do things, you have the proper way and then you have the way you do it in the workplace.* (Female student)
>
> *... at school we learnt how to attach hinges one way and in the workplace we learnt all the short cuts.* (Male student)
>
> *... if the students see it as a valuable thing, and the community sees it as a valuable thing then its got to be valuable as it gives them a better chance at employment and another avenue to go to.* (Male student)
>
> *... you get an opportunity to see what it [the job] is really like and to decide whether it is what you want to do.* (Female student)

A senior staff comment provides an informative summary of how school personnel perceived the differences in the more formalised experience of structured workplace learning:

> *These are periods of workplace learning in which defined learning outcomes have been set down for students to achieve while they are in the workplace. These learning outcomes commonly reflect industry defined competency standards. Structured work placements normally require these predetermined outcomes to be formally assessed by an accredited workplace assessor. Structured work placements are commonly contrasted to work experience, in which industry-determined predefined learning outcomes and assessment are absent.* (Principal)

In addition, in at least one region associated with the research, the feeling was that the dominant culture inside the school had an impact on how much structured work placement learning was available to schools and whether it was important for students to participate in or not.

It was considered that schools had a responsibility to work with small enterprises to design and construct workplace learning experiences to reflect prescribed learning outcomes for the students, to ensure appropriate work competencies were addressed, and to ensure that the needs of the employer were considered and addressed. This sense of structure associated with work competencies was seen as the major difference from work experience.

Priority given to SWL

Structured workplace learning is not the first priority of schools. School personnel who work in the field have expressed mixed views about SWL. This research has brought out the frustration felt by those trying to improve VET in schools.

The negative views expressed by school personnel related to status, legalities, time and difficulties in managing students. One commentator noted, 'VET in high school is not embedded in the school culture and has a way to go before it displaces the priority given to academic subjects'. Academic subjects are more highly valued and attract a greater share of school resources. The argument put forward by vocational co-ordinators of the need for all students to apply their knowledge in a workplace setting has not convinced those who pursue only academic studies of the need to broaden their approaches.

More students are participating in workplace learning in small enterprises with little or no direct supervision by teaching staff, and school personnel report a growing legal concern about due care, learning outcome obligations, quality of student care and learning, and the vocational accreditation processes. The responsibilities that the school accepts in teaching students are being shared with employers, and while insurance policies cover occupational health and safety, damage to property and people, there is no such protection for learning and accreditation. The time involved in preparing the placements fully can be prohibitive for school personnel and employers. School personnel report that the legal implications of SWL require a great deal of attention from education systems and employer associations.

The time taken to teach students discrete subjects, particularly academic ones, is under increased pressure from those who pursue VET learning in classrooms. School personnel report that 'teachers have a sense that their domain is only their classroom—they do not experience the opportunity to bring their personal experiences into learning'. Further they resist students being outside the school participating in work placements when they feel that academic subjects should take priority. The frustration that vocational co-ordinators reported in the research is centred on the need to improve professional development for teachers and to support teachers to adapt their curriculum to a changing world with different demands, demands radically different from those at the time when most of them completed their teacher training.

Managing the learning process is hard enough with around thirty students in classes. To add the dimension of releasing some of them to attend SWL, while at the same time they attempt to complete the course, adds to the complexity of managing student learning and ensuring the learning outcomes are being met. A typical comment from school administrators was 'teachers perceive increasing the number of students outside the school is harder to manage'.

On the positive side, schools reported that 'structured workplace learning was seen to enhance the image of the school in the community'. Parents and employers appreciated the opportunity to work with young people in different forums and began to understand better what the school was trying to achieve. The schools were able to show that they were part of the community. Furthermore, schools were very pleased with the greater sense of student maturity that SWL seemed to promote. A typical comment from schools was 'a higher level of maturity is expected of the student as they need to manage their time and organisational arrangements a good deal more'. This had a positive impact on their learning and often was transferred to other courses.

Positive learning experiences

On the whole, students reported positive learning experiences while participating in structured work placements. By contrast with the negative comments below, their positive experiences derived from working in a range of contexts and engaging actively in meaningful and more holistic tasks. Typical comments included:

I learnt about what it was like to prepare fast food on a large scale.

... it is valuable to gain experience of what the workplace is like. I wear a waiter's outfit, serve customers, set and clear tables, fill teapots and learn customer communication skills.

I rotate through various sections ... imports, inward rooms (debits), outward rooms (credits), mistake rectification ...

... the initial getting over the boundaries of learning what you have to do, realising exactly what happens and how things happen and trying to get through it all ...

I learnt the major components of building a kitchen.

Lessons learnt by students

Students reported on lessons they had learnt from their involvement in structured workplace learning. Their comments strongly reflected that the key lessons were about workplace relations rather than technical tasks:

... it is not as easy as it sounds [comment in relation to the length of the working day 9–5].

... need to work with other people, regardless of whether you like them or not ... you learn to tolerate people of all differences and everything.

... to talk to people on the phone ... how to greet people ... basic work you would learn at any job.

... you do things a lot quicker. For example, at school it takes a whole term to learn something ... there I learnt to do it in a day ... much quicker.

What employers are looking for

From the school perspective, the prevalent belief is that employers are looking for people who are 'flexible'. School administrators and students all commented on the need to be flexible. Comments from students that hinted at their flexibility, particularly in terms of working with other people in the workplaces include:

... pick it up as you listen.

... under a pressure situation you seem to pick up a lot more because ... you know if you don't, you could be in a lot of trouble.

... it's different, it's hands on, it's experience.

... if you want to keep your job you've got to learn.

... they knew we had the skills to be able to do it.

... a lot of it is teamwork.

... you want to learn something ... you want to be challenged.

... team work

... communication skills

Schools' contribution to SWL

In both States, school personnel strongly believed that schools were making a major contribution to the development of structured workplace learning in their communities. Ways in which they thought they were making such a contribution included:

- the formation of school clusters to work more strategically to give the processes greater credibility in schools and with enterprises (e.g. standard induction processes, standard manuals and monitoring, standard processes for placement of students)
- the establishment of school-based facilitators/co-ordinators
- the instigation of school-based policy and organisational reform to enable structured 'workplace learning' to complement 'school-based' learning
- the development of parent and business support

Schools believed they were developing procedures to encourage small enterprise personnel *into schools* to help with the education of young people and better meet the needs of employers for a skilled workforce.

Impact of log books

Both students and teachers believed that the log books associated with training packages provide structure to vocational education and training and provide a focus to small enterprises on what, and how, to assess students. Students were impressed with the log books and thought they provided the structure that employers wanted and the articulation of the steps they needed to follow to be successful. Indications of their support of the log book are reflected in the following comments:

... we had a logbook in which we had to cover a certain amount of work.

... it put us under pressure to get it right.

... you are shown what to do [by employers] ... and then you pick it up on your own ... you're learning and practising your skills on a continual basis.

... it's like making a chocolate cake. If you put in the wrong ingredients, you're not going to come out with the right product.

Negative learning experiences

Although students were generally positive about the learning experiences of SWL, most of their negative comments are related to repetitive tasks, narrowly based opportunities, or inappropriate placements, given student interests or prior work experiences. The comments come only from some students who were placed in the service and hospitality industries.

The students' comments included:

They [the school] put me at a service industry placement but I do voluntary work with my Mum who works for the same organisation so I didn't learn anything.

At the last placement we got to cook full meals but out here I just cut up carrots; we never handle the food preparation.

I think it is important that we have to touch the food, like even just crummy jobs like cutting up carrots, but all I do is wash dishes; you lose interest.

It's all right doing dishes sometimes; I've had my shifts in the scullery, and that's like basically what you have to do, but when it comes to doing dishes constantly, it is a real put-off.

Barriers to overcome

School administrators often felt frustrated with small enterprises whom they believed still saw work experience as the desired outcome. Despite efforts to teach/convince employers about changes in the training system, it seemed entrenched views were hard to move forward. Two typical comments from school personnel were:

> *Because they are accustomed to work experience and this is a lot more structured than work experience, they don't understand what is required.*
>
> *None of those I've talked to have recognised workplace assessor qualifications, so when I go there I tell them I have those qualifications.*

The need for appropriate assessment of students cannot be overestimated. Training packages require school and small enterprise personnel to hold workplace assessor qualifications. Small enterprises find it difficult to release personnel to be trained and then to undertake the actual assessments during their busy working day.

Summary

Schools have a strong interest in vocational education and training and believe it has had an impact on student learning. They also recognise they have a long way to go if SWL is to be a significant priority of student learning. While schools will continue to use work experience in the short term, there is a growing need for professional development of teachers and small enterprise personnel to understand, and appreciate, the value of SWL in senior secondary education.

Students reported positive learning outcomes from their experiences and significant learning in workplace relations. It appears students recognised quickly the need for teamwork and getting on with others at the workplace. The need for flexibility in approaching learning at the workplace was well appreciated by students and seen by both students and school administrators as an essential characteristic employers required.

Schools believed they were making a positive contribution to the community through SWL initiatives and educating small enterprise personnel and parents about changes to Australia's training system. The use of log books was favoured by students and provided structure for both students and employers. The only negative learning reported by students was in the service and hospitality industries and mainly associated with repetitive tasks.

While schools recognise that there are still barriers to overcome, they believe a partnership approach with the community should greatly assist. They perceive a great deal of ignorance in the community about SWL and the Australian training system and believe they are playing a major part in helping others understand more about these areas. Time and resources for schools continue to be an issue but they believe they are making progress with SWL despite these barriers.

Exemplars of good practice

Overview

Information gathered from the many workplace learning situations was analysed and synthesised into three exemplars illustrating different aspects of good practice.

Exemplar 1 describes an aspect of a structured work placement program operating across a group of schools in Western Sydney. Exemplar 2 describes an approach used by a cluster of schools in Southern Adelaide. Exemplar 3 is hypothetical but based on a synthesis of the best features of several programs in both States. Exemplar 1 illustrates how work placements can be mutually beneficial—the students are adding value to the enterprises while themselves benefitting from the opportunity to be creative and enterprising in a real world situation. Exemplar 2 highlights the value of bringing workplace and teaching staff together in a collaborative venture focussed on the needs of young people. Action research and genuine problem-solving approaches result from the mix of experiences and differing backgrounds. Exemplar 3 is a skills training approach based on the professional needs of teachers, trainers and small enterprise operators which resulted in the development of new structures at a community level.

Exemplar 1: Information technology, small business and school links project

The foundation of this exemplar is a recognition of three factors.

- Small business often does not have the skills or knowledge to understand or apply new information technology initiatives to its operations, and in the day-to-day operation of the business there is not the time to learn these skills when confronted by the pressures of running the business.
- A number of information technology applications which can be applied to small business to enhance its profitability and to modernise the business are available. The ramifications of enhanced profitability may result in the advent of new employment possibilities.
- Schools have students who have well-developed information technology skills in a range of applications relevant to the successful operation of a small business enterprise. These students would therefore benefit by the application of these skills in a real work environment and, through a process of also understanding the operation of small business, can improve their employability in the labour market.

In this exemplar, a community organisation acts in a transactional role between the schools and the small business enterprises in a defined region, in order to match the needs of the small enterprise, the student and school. Essentially, the organisation places students who possess information technology skills in local small businesses which need a task undertaken requiring the application of those skills.

These tasks could include the design of a web page for the business, or training in aspects of information technology or a particular software program for the staff of the business. The students approach the work as a project to be undertaken and can draw on the talents of other young people at the school to assist in the task. For example, a web page may require assistance from students undertaking art or design. Informing the small business owner about the benefits

of Excel may also require assistance from a student with a mathematical or commerce background.

The organisation has links with small businesses and promotes the service it can offer through its own networks, the local papers and word of mouth. When an enterprise approaches the organisation, a staff member of the organisation is delegated to hold further discussions with the business about its requirements. The staff member visits the workplace to assess the situation first hand, and also to assess the capacity of the business to supervise the workplace learning for the student.

The small business is informed about the level of competence of the students to be given the project and asked to participate actively in providing the students with an understanding of the overall operation of the business as well as the specific project to be undertaken. This is important since it enables the student to understand how the project that they will be working on fits within the operation of the business. The anticipated duration of the project is discussed with the small business, together with the student attendance preference of the small business—to have students on a block release scheme or to attend the business at a set time on a regular day.

The organisation maintains close and regular links with the local senior high schools in the region and is seen as being able to offer high-quality workplace learning for the students in information technology prior to their leaving school. The schools promote the involvement of their students in this relationship, receive community recognition, and are able to promote their information technology courses as being directly relevant to the needs of business.

At the conclusion of the workplace learning experience, the students are assessed by the small business and the school against assessment criteria that were agreed at the commencement of the placement. The students also assess their own performance against agreed criteria and provide a report to the small business and the school about the outcomes, achievements and issues associated with their workplace learning.

Exemplar 2: The brokerage model—informing the theory and practice of VET

A project has been established as a regional pilot to broker workplace learning and VET between the schools and small business. The project has a mix of staff from small business and education backgrounds. The intersection of the skills and backgrounds of the staff creates a dynamic work environment where understandings are further enhanced and where it is possible to create new strategies to further workplace learning.

The project involves a cluster of schools, and staff of the project are acutely aware of the issues facing schools and staff in adjusting to the VET agenda, issues such as curriculum, timetabling, relief staff, resources and legal requirements. Project staff also network with small businesses in the region, hold regular forums for small businesses, and are aware of the pressures facing small business and the barriers to the participation of small businesses in workplace learning.

At the local and regional level, the project is working to forge partnerships between the schools and small business enterprises. At the commencement of the project, the staff found 'very scant resources of any research that had ever been done about what industry's point of view about any form of learning in the workplace' (regional VET co-ordinator).

This knowledge has subsequently been acquired as a result of the information brought to the project by staff from small business and from their work in practice. Difficulties were encountered in how to access small businesses.

> *What is fascinating to me is in fact my observation of small business that it works on person to person and my observation about teaching is that it works person to person and yet teachers seem to think that if they want to get something from small business, they can do it through a letter rather than person to*

person. It is a time factor but it is also failing to understand that if you want someone to do something for you, you have to approach them personally and you have to demonstrate to them that there is something in it. (Regional VET co-ordinator)

This is an important comment on the type of learning that can occur when a joint strategy is developed to look at the issue of workplace learning.

A similar example that can inform practice is as follows:

I went to a Jobs Network meeting and everybody was talking small business—not one small business person was there because it was 9.30 in the morning. So, if they really wanted to be serious and involve small business, they would have put it on at 7.30 at night. (Regional VET co-ordinator)

Project staff also assist in arranging TAFE courses to be delivered at school and determine which modules are better taught in the school environment, TAFE and/or the workplace. Through the project work with the schools, TAFE and small businesses, new understandings have arisen which are being documented and will be used to inform future practice in the VET area.

This kind of project operates to create change and can be used to inform future improvement; it also demonstrates the benefits to be derived from all participants resulting from collaborative participation.

So I then put the proposition that if you were going to move towards partnerships with industry, one of the things that schools could actually do is identify what core competencies schools have got that they could actually offer small enterprises. One thing we threw around was there are not a lot of graphic designers around, so why couldn't the schools offer students to design letterheads, flyers, brochures etc. They get that business contact, sort of client–artist relationship. They would have to come in to get the brief, go away and do it, bring it back. That's one thing we have identified where you could get that relationship going and offer something. I think there are real possibilities in that.

(Manager, finance)

A genuine action research, and improved model emerged as a result of staff from different sectors of the community being able to share experiences and problem-solve issues dealing with the futures of young people. In this model the skills and new information (knowledge) young people bring with them is acknowledged and enhanced by experiential use in the workplace.

Exemplar 3: Partnerships—VET and small enterprise training

A community has forged a formal memorandum of understanding between schools, TAFE and small enterprises. The aim of the partnership is to 'help young people build the best foundations for the future by providing them with opportunities to experience careers that interest them'. The organisation managing the project has a formal structure outside the school environment and is a registered training organisation (RTO). It was formed initially to improve vocational education in the region.

The driving force behind the arrangement was a group of small business people and vocational education teachers. The small enterprise people recognised that they needed to improve their on-the-job training skills if they were to realise full advantage from vocational training, traineeships and apprenticeships. The vocational education teachers recognised that, if their students were going to succeed in the world of work, staff needed to improve their knowledge of how skills and competencies were actually used in the workplace. The innovative aspects of this partnership are that small business realised that their skills needed development and agreed to undertake formal skills training, and equally teachers agreed to participate in after-hours professional development delivered by small enterprise people.

The Small Enterprise Training Program

Small enterprise operators undertake a course that aims to 'encourage a culture of training in each of the participant's business'. The course is provided free to small enterprise in return for being involved in the partnership and its programs.

The course includes developing skills in the enterprise to:

- prepare, deliver and evaluate training sessions
- improve self-confidence and communication skills
- improve work team communication
- enhance workplace morale

The small enterprise training is accredited and derives from the Training Package for Assessment and Workplace Training. Small enterprise operators who participate in the program receive as a minimum, the achievement of the unit of competence 'Train small groups'.

Vocational Teachers Professional Development Program

The small enterprise operators then host workshops for the vocational education teachers.

Topics that are covered include:

- occupational health and safety
- equal employment opportunity
- sales techniques
- presentation of goods
- resume preparation
- employer responsibilities
- security in the workplace
- customer service

The VET teachers are involved in training by the small enterprises and gain first-hand experience of small enterprise operation, direct feedback from employers, up-to-date information, career path information, and are able to better prepare the students for workplace learning.

As a result of the project, small enterprise people have improved their training skills and teachers have developed a better understanding of the small enterprise environment, leading to the students becoming better prepared for employment. The organisation co-ordinates vocational education placements for all senior secondary students in the areas of hospitality, retail, furnishings, metals and engineering and information technology. Small enterprises are actively involved in the students' assessments and invited to comment on their progress.

Enterprise education is also a component of the program and focusses on the E-Team concept and Transition Teams. Enterprise days are held when achievements of students in enterprise education are recognised. These days are sponsored by business from the community, and awards are given to students for their achievements by selected 'enterprising' young businesses from the area.

This concept of youth who are 'making it in business' celebrating and acknowledging the achievements of enterprising young people in school is an interesting facet of the model that draws upon the principles of peer education.

The program has developed the following five components:

- career education, involving guest speakers about careers in the area, together with the holding of regular careers markets involving a large number of employers
- site visits to small businesses as a follow-up to the careers markets

- vocational educational co-ordination for the whole district involving all of the high schools and the business community
- enterprise education (as noted)
- community service in areas such as Meals on Wheels and Aged Care

Development of a theoretical framework

Introduction

In this section of the report, a theoretical framework for inter-relationships between small enterprises and school VET has been developed.

The construction of this theoretical framework has been influenced by the findings of this research, particularly the confusion surrounding workplace learning, school and small enterprise links, the lack of clearly defined roles, lack of effective mechanisms for co-ordination, and often, the absence of a sense of working together for some common purpose. Furthermore, its development has been motivated by the ANTA Small Business Training Policy Framework. This framework stated that the purpose of the policy was 'for the small business to take an active partnership role in meeting its training needs and to create an environment in which training and lifelong learning is recognised as being vital to the competitiveness and survival of small business' (ANTA 1996, p.5).

Schools, education systems and business representatives are endeavouring to determine the nature of workplace learning, often without having any broad understanding of *why* they are engaged in the activity, *how* to measure it, *how* to evaluate the outcomes, and *what* it might look like in their own context. Employers in small enterprise are increasingly inundated with requests by schools to provide opportunities for workplace learning, many with little perceived benefit to the employer. Frameworks for what is to be learnt by the student and how it will be assessed and who will assess the learning have not generally been developed in consultation with the small enterprise.

Schools have not sufficiently developed processes to fully accredit the learning that takes place in the workplace; nor have they been given the tools or resources to undertake such development. Not all parties are actively engaged in effective dialogue leading to resolution of these issues at the local level. Small enterprises are becoming increasingly disillusioned in their attempts to navigate through changes in policy and programs in this area with little support. Students may still have outdated notions of workplace learning as being the same as work experience and some have not recognised the opportunities that workplace learning can present.

A range of structural barriers exists to more effective partnerships between school and industry. These include different regulations concerning the work and the school environment, child protection issues, the construction of professional elites within the education sector and the business world, and institutional barriers. Ideally, it would be good practice to have staff from both sectors regularly visit and participate in each other's workplaces and in order to gain a greater understanding and to inform the practice of each. Barriers between mainstream teachers, VET educators and staff from business (whether they are trainers, supervisors, managers or technicians) are constructed so that the benefits of workplace learning are reduced. Possibilities of opening up this cross-fertilisation of specialisation, knowledge and practice are actively being sought within some high schools in both States visited.

Notwithstanding, there are also good examples of schools, small enterprise and local communities trying to make meaning of the new opportunities and directions which change invariably opens up. Institutional barriers are constructed around the all-important senior secondary curriculum which until recently has not even acknowledged workplace learning within its framework, concentrating instead on academic achievement and entrance to university.

School–industry partnerships need to examine how learning that takes place in the workplace can be integrated into the theoretical context of the learning that occurs in schools and how students can be assessed within this framework. The assessment is normally assumed to be the domain of the educators within the schools system with some input from the workplace. From the outset this approach devalues the learning that takes place in the workplace.

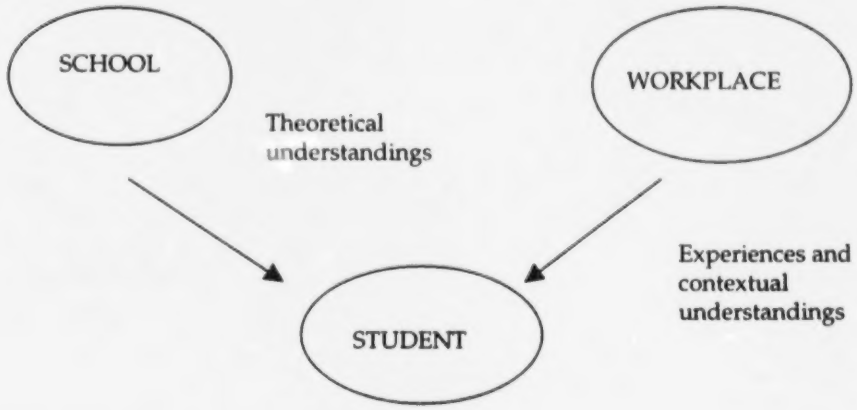
Models of SWL as part of a learning environment

The proposed framework offers a model of workplace learning based on the active participation of all stakeholders in the structured workplace learning activity. All of the stakeholders are linked by virtue of the perceived benefits of the partnership to all parties. By regarding each of the stakeholders as being engaged in a learning partnership, it becomes possible to better identify the barriers to learning and therefore to define the benefits.

In a student-centred pedagogy the pivotal stakeholder is the student (see figure 1). This concept of education allows the student to relate what he or she is studying in the school environment with what is learnt from the work placement. In general terms the workplace is meant to provide some *experience* which would give the student some *understanding*. These *experiences* and *understandings* are often conceptualised in very broad generic terms with little process for linking back into the school to inform the curriculum.

A substantial degree of work has been undertaken in recent years to address the issue of a mechanism that links *theory* and *practice*, most notably with the development of the key competency framework. Issues still to be resolved include the generic nature of the key competencies and the context-specific nature of application and demonstration of the key competencies in the workplace.

Figure 1: A model of student-centred pedagogy



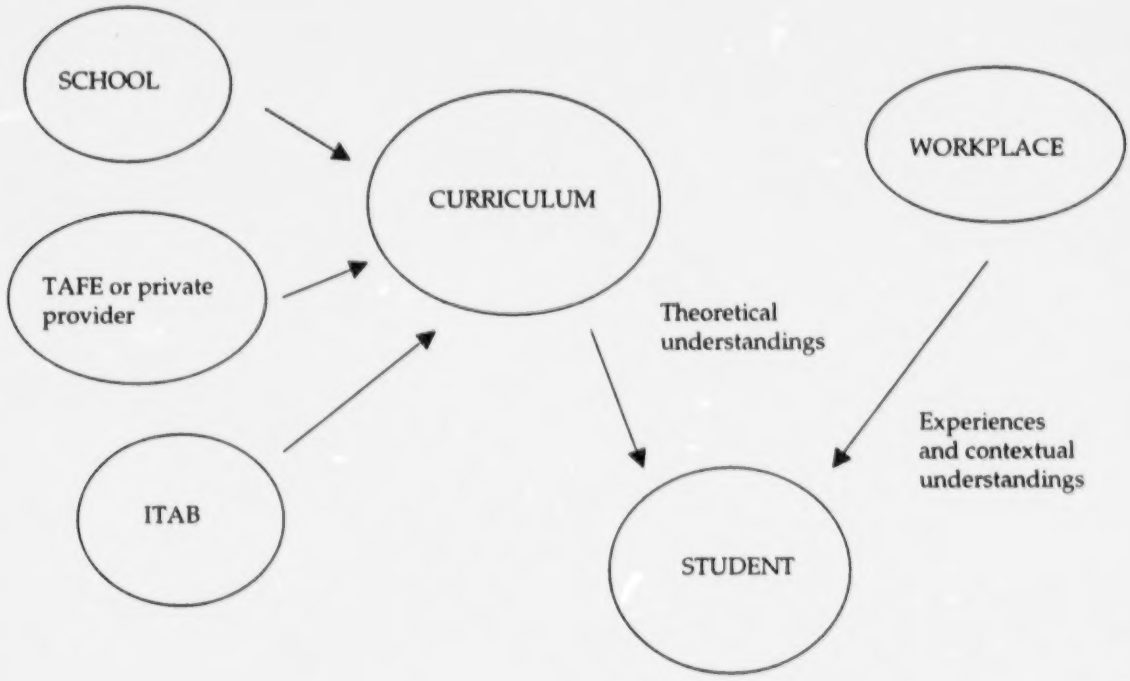
The existing model also falsely assumes that structured workplace learning is somehow separate from other forms of learning that occur in play, in life generally, from peers and in the community, and that it can be made distinct, separated out, analysed and improved by looking at the student/school relationship and the pervasive 'curriculum'. These improvements usually involve the development of new methods to provide an assessment mechanism to link the learning in the school with that taking place in the workplace.

Improvements have also been made in the links between the school and TAFE in an attempt to create a more 'vocational' atmosphere to the placement. Links with industry training advisory bodies (ITABs) and business and industry groups have also been improved in order to articulate,

define and most importantly (from the viewpoint of the schools) accredit the learning outcomes from the work placement in terms of the curriculum (see figure 2).

The learning is seen to be solely for the benefit of the student who often remains a passive player in the relationship, the person for whom this relationship between the players has been constructed.

Figure 2: An adapted model of school, student, TAFE, ITAB, business and industry



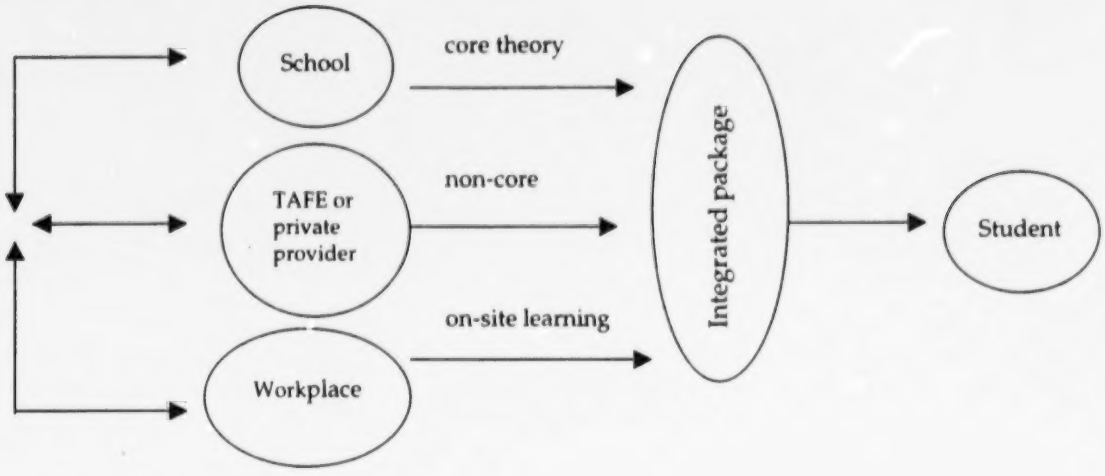
In this model the student can develop industry-specific competencies which have been learnt in the workplace. The clarification of the competencies developed in the workplace, the school and TAFE, have been divided between the stakeholders. All that is required is for the student to learn these competencies and be assessed by each of the parties to varying degrees to gain accreditation.

A model that represents this arrangement has been developed in South Australia in the automotive industry through a partnership between schools, TAFE, the industry training body, the Motor Traders' Association and car dealerships.

The schools provide the core theory, TAFE provides the non-core components, the industry the on-site learning, and with all elements successfully integrated, the student can be issued with an accredited South Australian Certificate of Education and Industry Certificate with recognition in the Australian Qualifications Framework (see figure 3).

This model still has the potential to provide structured workplace learning which gives all stakeholders a role in the design, delivery and assessment of the learning that occurs. However, it is most beneficial when utilised with big business which has the training resources to be involved, or with a representative association of employers (as in the case of the Motor Traders' Association).

Figure 3: School, student and workplace linkages



An initial local-level partnership—what is the benefit to the small business?

At a local level it becomes more possible for schools to develop links with small enterprises which can inform the design of workplace learning. There are, however, implications for the resourcing, training and involvement of both parties. If these barriers can be overcome, there exists a possibility for schools and small businesses to form local-level partnerships where the small business can have an input into the students' learning and, at the same time benefit from providing workplace learning. Further development of these models at a local level would need a blurring of the boundaries that separate the school and the workplace.

For such partnerships to be successful, representatives from the workplace would need to understand, as well as have some input into, the theory and curriculum of what was being taught in the school and its relevance to the workplace. The school would also need to have a practical understanding of how the workplace operated and what could be taught in the workplace that related to the school curriculum. The workplace would also need to have a clear understanding of its role in the student assessment process.

A problem with this arrangement, however, is that there is little general understanding of benefits to the small enterprise other than 'feel good' benefits that have been constructed from the viewpoint of the school and education system. Little material has been developed that can be applied to tap into the level of altruism found amongst small enterprises.

The Enterprise and Career Education Foundation has attempted to articulate reasons why employers should be involved in workplace learning. The following list was developed:

- It raises their profile within their community.
- It provides employers with more understanding about, and involvement in, education.
- It helps to minimise the gap between what teachers expect students to have learnt at school and employers' expectations of school leavers when they reach the workplace proper.
- It develops the management skills and training of those employees who take on the role of workplace learning supervisors.
- It gives them and their industry an opportunity to invest in skilling the future workforce.
- Their involvement in the program gives access to a potential pool of skilled employees at a lower cost than traditional recruitment methods.

- It can provide an extra pair of hands on the job.
- It fosters greater appreciation of young people. (ECEF 2001a)

While all of these reasons are valid, they are still coming primarily from the perspective of the education system and not the business.

We are in small enterprises, thank you—a more developed model

Childs (1997) argues that, when the VET sector works with large organisations,

> *... there are common goals—achieving skills diversification, skill intensification, learning organisation teams, work based learning and so on. This same convergence does not come easily with small business. What constitutes 'success' in terms of VET (credentials either formally or informally obtained, national standards, assessable learning outcomes and industry development) does not constitute 'success' for small business (wanting to work on immediate issues and enterprise development, to deal with issues of survival and in improving marginal profits).* (Childs 1997, p. 23)

With 32% of small enterprises not surviving the first year and only 8% surviving past ten years, the interest of these businesses in, and the time that they can allocate to, workplace learning must be regarded as minimal at best within the current paradigm.

The prime function of any business at a micro level is to make money, to remain in business. However, the relationship between the school, the student and the small enterprise has to be seen in a radically different light—for simply satisfying the bottom-line function.

There is a need to examine ways in which the student or the school can *value-add* to the prime role of the small enterprise in the same way as the small enterprise is asked to value-add to the student's learning and meet the requirements of the prime function of the school in providing education and ultimately linking to the labour market. The first step in this direction is to recognise the student as an active participant in the process. He or she brings skills, attributes, attitudes and outside knowledge to the workplace which can enhance the operation of the small enterprise.

In business terminology, there is a *transaction* occurring which can provide mutual benefit.

What the small enterprise can offer:

- a more personal and supportive work environment conducive to mentoring
- knowledge about the operation of the small enterprise as a whole entity
- product knowledge
- links to other small enterprises and local networks
- an opportunity to develop enterprise skills of a generic nature
- practical experience of the world of work
- possible future traineeship or apprenticeship opportunities

What the school can offer:

- a pool of skilled young people who can value-add to the enterprise
- community recognition for participating small enterprises
- accreditation for the student
- staff support to the student and the small enterprise
- management of the placement
- information about various VET initiatives, traineeship and apprenticeship programs and possible wage subsidies
- assistance with assessment processes and instruments

- access to different community networks for the small enterprise
- back up and support of a large school community

What the student can offer:

- another pair of hands to the operation of the small enterprise or a particular product
- skills and knowledge that may not currently exist within the small enterprise (for example, IT and graphic design skills)
- staffing to overcome a temporary problem facing the small enterprise
- an outside and youthful perspective on the operation of the small enterprise
- product design, development and marketing ideas
- potential employee pool of known skills and talent

In using this notion of a business transaction, the benefits to each player can be clearly documented. All parties are engaged in a learning partnership which can be an active and ongoing process.

The missing stakeholder—refining the partnership and the transaction

Returning to the basic theme of how learning occurs and that workplace learning cannot be removed from 'learning' generally as something that occurs in isolation, the researchers would argue that there are other stakeholders in the equation, such as the community, another TAFE or private provider.

Schools, small enterprises and students are not operating in a vacuum where learning occurs in isolation from other influencing factors. The student learns from family, peers and a whole range of community agencies as well as from the school and the workplace environment. The school and the small enterprise operate within a community context which is the milieu of their operation. If the community is severely disadvantaged with high levels of welfare dependency, then the expectations of the school, the student and the small enterprise may be significantly lowered. The transaction between the stakeholders is consequently diminished. All four parties need to be viewed as a part of the transaction with an analysis of the benefit to each party, and all are part of a learning partnership.

To be stakeholders in a learning partnership, each party needs to identify why they are participating, what they bring to the transaction, how they propose to undertake it and what they potentially gain from it. An analysis of these four aspects, based on this study's review of the literature and field interviews, is provided below (figures 4a–d).

This model of a learning partnership between the stakeholders has the potential to rejuvenate communities and develop more enterprising communities whereby sectors of the community have a role to play. The model stresses the importance of the 'transaction' as being pivotal to an analysis of workplace learning and brings workplace learning back into its relevant context.

Figure 4a: Reasons for participation in a partnership

STUDENTS	SCHOOL
❑ Get a qualification to assist in further education or employment. ❑ Learn about a particular job or business. ❑ Make contacts with potential employers ❑ Possibly get a traineeship or apprenticeship. ❑ Improve their skills. ❑ Make better career choices. ❑ Become engaged in the adult world. ❑ Get out of formal classroom-based education.	❑ Implement government policy. ❑ Give students exposure to the world of work. ❑ Enhance the linkages between the school and small enterprise. ❑ Raise the profile of the school within the community. ❑ Address attitudinal issues of some students. ❑ Learn from workplace practice in order to assess the relevance of the curriculum and what is being taught. ❑ Keep abreast of new and emergent trends in the workplace and the implications for school education and resources.
SMALL ENTERPRISES	**COMMUNITY**
❑ Value-add to the enterprise through getting a particular job done which the business may not have the skills or time to undertake. ❑ Learn from the students' skills to be able to undertake new tasks on a sustainable basis. ❑ Get the opinions of people outside the business as to its operations or products. ❑ Keep up to date with new developments in the training and skilling of a potential workforce. ❑ Learn about new technologies. ❑ Learn about new fashion and design first hand. ❑ Look at potential recruits. ❑ Gain information about government services and programs. ❑ Gain community recognition as a good corporate citizen.	❑ Learn about business development and innovation. ❑ Revitalise local and regional economies. ❑ Support local business initiative. ❑ Assist young people from the community to gain practical workplace skills and enhance their employment prospects. ❑ Increase the number of skilled people in the community and develop a flexible and multi skilled community workforce. ❑ Ensure that the school is offering relevant curriculum to provide learning to the students. ❑ Develop enterprise skills and entrepreneurial skills in the community. ❑ Ensure that young people pass into adulthood via experience of the world of work.

Figure 4b: What each stakeholder brings to the partnership

STUDENTS	SCHOOL
❑ Skills grounded in a strong theoretical base that may be relevant to the small enterprise. ❑ Recent understandings of technological changes. ❑ Knowledge of latest trends in the youth market. ❑ Desire to experiment and be innovative. ❑ Outside perspective to the operation of the small enterprise. ❑ Network of family members and peers. ❑ Willingness to learn.	❑ Pool of skilled students. ❑ Willingness to have the students participate in project based learning of relevance to the small enterprise. ❑ Support, external supervision and management of the overall placement and workplace learning experience. ❑ Network of staff, parents and students which can promote or buy the services or product offered by the small enterprise. ❑ Ability to accredit the outcomes of the workplace learning. ❑ Ability to recognise the work of the small enterprise in the community. ❑ Outside resources that may be able to assist the small enterprise in a particular area of relevance to the business.
SMALL ENTERPRISES	**COMMUNITY**
❑ Context in which the school can validate its curriculum and its relevance. ❑ Workplace which enables the student to learn. ❑ Mentoring role and workplace situation which enables the student to move from a student centred pedagogy into an adult learning andragogy. ❑ Desire to improve its operation and product and to listen to input made by the student. ❑ Range of networks and contacts for the student. ❑ Ability to expand, innovate and create employment opportunities in the community.	❑ Community support of the products and services offered by the small enterprise. ❑ Community recognition of the small enterprise. ❑ Networks and contacts for the small enterprise. ❑ Recognition of the students progress into an adult method learning and responsibility. ❑ Increased support for the school. ❑ Strategy to recognise the altruism of enterprises which includes: • Infrastructure to support the partnership. • Civic leadership to foster the partnership.

Figure 4c: How each party can participate in the partnership

STUDENTS

- Having a sound understanding of what is being taught in the school environment.
- Being active participants in the process.
- Willingness to move from a student-centred pedagogy into an adult education learning andragogy.
- Being keen to integrate theory and practice.
- Having a desire and willingness to assist small enterprise with a particular project.
- By active discussion of their work placement with other students, the school, the small enterprise and family and friends.
- Assisting in the design of their placement, the learning outcomes they wish to achieve and an evaluation of those outcomes.
- By providing a link between the school, the small enterprise and the community and assisting in the integration of the knowledge that takes place in the workplace into the school curriculum.
- By informing the development of new theory and practice.

SCHOOLS

- Ensuring that their curriculum is up to date and as far as possible meets the needs of small enterprise.
- Developing a catalogue of skills that the students possess.
- By marketing that catalogue of skills to small enterprise.
- By adapting curriculum in the light of feedback from small enterprise and students.
- By actively encouraging relationships between the school and small enterprise.
- By working with small enterprise on the identification of suitable projects for the students to undertake which can add value to the small enterprise.
- By informing the community of its relationships with small enterprises and promoting that relationship.
- Ensuring that small enterprise is well informed of traineeships and new apprenticeship possibilities.
- By understanding the nature of what is being taught in the workplace.
- By training staff in the benefits of workplace learning.
- Promoting and developing enterprise competencies amongst the students.
- Involving the community more closely with the school and what is occurring.

SMALL ENTERPRISES

- Developing an understanding of what is being taught in the schools and how it is being taught.
- Developing relationships with particular staff at the school.
- Clearly identifying projects in the workplace suitable for the students and are meaningful to the operation of the small enterprise and the student.
- By liaising with the school and the student about the nature of the learning occurring during the students' work placement.
- By being open to innovation and suggestion from the student.
- By playing a mentoring role with the student during their learning.
- By providing the opportunity for the student to display a range of talents and ability.
- By assisting in the design of an assessment instrument and being actively involved in the assessment.
- By ensuring that the workplace meets OH&S requirements.
- By promoting the success of the experience for the small enterprise and celebrating the success of the student.

COMMUNITY

- Promoting the learning partnership through community networks including local government and community agencies and businesses.
- Promoting the work of the school and participating small enterprises.
- Organising celebration of successes that occur and recognition for participants.
- Highlighting examples of best practice.
- Buying goods and services produced by participating small enterprises.
- Encouraging youth enterprise and entrepreneurial developments.
- Providing feedback to the school, the small enterprise and the student.
- Recognising the altruism of small enterprises through providing infrastructure support to enhance the partnerships formed and through civic leadership to foster the partnership.

Figure 4d: Potential benefits to each party from the partnership

STUDENTS	SCHOOLS
❑ Opportunity to practise skills learnt in the classroom in the workplace. ❑ Experience of the world of work while still at school. ❑ Accreditation through the school and the TAFE and in some instances industry accreditation. ❑ New contacts and networks to assist in finding work. ❑ New skills that are workplace-specific. ❑ Opportunity to be innovative and experimental. ❑ Recognition from the workplace, the community and their peers. ❑ Enterprise skills. ❑ Sense of adulthood and active community participation.	❑ Greater community and government recognition. ❑ Contact with small business for future student learning placements. ❑ Validation of its curriculum. ❑ Greater student satisfaction with the relevance of the education offered by the school. ❑ Outcomes for its students in terms of learning and greater employment outcomes. ❑ Enhanced community links. ❑ Teachers who are more familiar with the needs and aspirations of small business.
SMALL ENTERPRISES	**COMMUNITY**
❑ Enhanced profitability from the work undertaken by the student. ❑ Greater community recognition. ❑ Understanding of new technologies. ❑ Access to new networks. ❑ From having a specific task(s) completed by the student which enhances in some way the operation of the small enterprise. ❑ Access to potential new employees with a basic understanding of the operations of small enterprise.	❑ A more dynamic community through the partnership. ❑ New employment growth. ❑ More participation of young people in adult life. ❑ Ideas for new economic growth and development. ❑ Relevant education system for its young people.

Two themes running through this analysis of the 'transaction' model are as follows:

- ❖ the importance of the development of enterprise skills, attitudes and abilities in young people and the role of small enterprises in this development
- ❖ the movement of young people from one method of learning in the school to an adult learning methodology and the role of the stakeholders in this process

These two themes are now discussed in further detail.

Small business and enterprise—what small business wants in employees

Small business is by its very nature enterprising, yet generally the school is not teaching young people enterprise skills. This is central to the relationship between the school and business and industry generally. There is very often a cultural gap in the perceptions of each of the skills and attitudes young people need to have in order to be work-ready.

Business and industry have consistently rated 'attitude' as being the single most important factor in their recruitment practices. As Misko concludes from her study:

> *... personal attributes rather than specific technical skills or expertise are what the great majority of employers consider to be essential for students in the workplace. Personal attributes like punctuality, willingness to learn, ability to learn, self-discipline, courtesy, responsiveness and co-operation were considered essential by more than half the supervisors in this study.* (Misko 1998, p.97)

A survey of recruitment practices by Australian companies undertaken by the National Industry Education Forum of the Business Council of Australia in 1995 (Stanton 1995) found the following types of responses to the following question:

Could you describe the major competencies/attributes that you look for in recruiting staff from outside the organisation for entry-level positions at non-graduate or management level?

- interpersonal skills
- initiative, adaptability, flexibility
- hire the smile and attitude and train the rest
- ability to want to learn
- we believe that you can train skills and knowledge, not attitude
- motivated self-starter, initiative, flexible, independence, drive
- ability to think broadly
- ability to embrace change

Transition from student-centred pedagogy to adult learning

Workplace learning can be viewed as a time of transition when students are moving from one set of learning principles where they have been generally dependent in the learning process towards a more independent adult learning model. In this time of transition, the student has a foot in both camps. The role of the mentor in this situation is critical. The mentor is the person who assists the transition between learning styles and in essence assists the young person through the 'rites of passage' into the adult world.

It is informative to conceptualise workplace learning from an anthropological perspective. The school and family have nurtured and brought the young person to a point where he or she can begin to move into adulthood. The workplace provides a point of experience with the adult world with all its new connections, including being treated in an entirely different manner. Mentoring needs to occur between a trusted person in the school and in the workplace, to assist the young person in a process of making meaning of the workplace experience and what has been learnt. The assessment of the young person's learning and active participation in the workplace can be an extremely enriching and positive experience. And yet in our current practice it is difficult to get schools and small enterprises to talk to each other and mostly they have little conception of each other's processes and practices.

If the student is moving into an adult learning model, then it is also informative to examine the characteristics of an adult learner. Such a model is based on four crucial assumptions (according to Knowles 1984) about the characteristics of adult learners which are different from those of child learners.

As young people mature:

- Their self-concept moves from being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directing human being.
- They accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning.
- Their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles.
- Their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application.

A practical example of how adults would best learn comes from Knowles (1984) when discussing the application of adult learning principles:

- there is a need to explain why specific things are being taught (for example, in IT certain commands, functions, operations, etc.)
- instruction should be task-oriented instead of memorization—learning activities should be in the context of common tasks to be performed
- instruction should take into account the wide range of different backgrounds of learners; learning materials and activities should allow for different levels/types of previous experience (for example, with computers)
- since adults are relatively more self-directed than children, instruction should allow learners to discover things for themselves, providing guidance and help when mistakes are made

(Knowles 1984, Appendix D)

These principles have direct relevance to workplace learning which forms the transition point and access point into adult methods of learning. Essentially adult learners are expected to have initiative, flexibility, be self-directed, want to learn and actively engage in the learning process which is of direct relevance to them.

These expectations of adult learning neatly dovetail with the characteristics expected to characterise enterprise education and with the expectations of business and industry when looking to recruit staff. This reinforces the need for schools to become increasingly engaged with enterprise education and to develop and foster enterprise competence in students. Such an engagement better prepares students in transition from school to the workplace because they have been introduced to new ways of learning which begin to make meaning in the context of the workplace learning experience. There would not then be the same gulf between the school and the world of adulthood and work, a situation which has affected many students as they experience difficulty in making the transition.

Such a model of educational development would require the training of specialist enterprise educators in schools and the development of teacher enterprise education. Schools would be more receptive to people from small enterprise being recruited into the education environment. The role of small enterprise in a learning partnership would be to develop more awareness that students are young adults who are becoming engaged in an adult learning relationship. There is also a strong case to educate small enterprise as to how to manage/train and relate to students (as employees and as learners). The role of mentors in workplaces as coaches is critical, and is an area that needs greater attention if enterprises are to develop and maintain training/learning cultures (Harris, Simons & Bone 2000).

Roles of the stakeholders in a learning partnership

The students need to have a good understanding of the theory of what they are taught in the school; they need to be able to observe the workplace and experiment and apply knowledge in a real context outside the school environment, to reflect on the experience and to make sense of the experience. They also need to be able to relate the results of this process back to the school to inform future developments.

The role of the school is to ensure that what is being taught can be applied and is of relevance in the workplace. The school also requires the capacity to allow for and encourage modification of curriculum in the light of feedback from students, employers and the community. The school also needs to be involved in active experimentation to advance its theory and knowledge base.

Workplace employers need to be cognisant of what is being taught in the schools and its relevance to the workplace. The small enterprise needs to be willing to allow for real experience by the student and to encourage the student to experiment with ideas that may add value to the small enterprise. It is important for the workplace to have a role in the evaluation of students' workplace experience, and a mechanism whereby feedback can be given and respected. The

business also should be prepared to modify and adapt its function in the light of new ideas and emergent technologies.

Through this process the community can continually redefine social capital-building, playing a significant part in supporting and actively encouraging the development of theory and workplace experience and experimentation. The process of supporting and encouraging young people, partnerships, interaction, experience and experimentation, enables the community to offer new opportunity through new enterprise business developments, relevant education and a sense of community renewal.

What an enterprising learning partnership could look like

Enterprise learning is by its very nature 'experiential' (Kolb 1984) and focussed on active experimentation and innovation. Grant, Newey and Spanglett (1997) elaborate enterprise skills as follows:

- Enterprise skills include focussed decision-making, creativity, negotiation, conflict resolution, risk management, initiative, financial planning and marketing
- Enterprise skills also differ from general employability skills in that they put more emphasis on individual initiative and action to improve circumstances as opposed to being restricted to skills that allow one to be successful within one organisation
- Enterprise skills would help young people cope with a broader range of employment circumstances including non standard work arrangements, employment volatility and full time work with highly decentralised organisations
- The growing importance of the dynamic small business sector is placing emphasis on the ability to move quickly between firms. Career spans are being greatly shortened—many young people are experiencing elongated periods of unstable employment. They have not made an explicit choice to pursue a career based on flexibility and risk, it's merely their lot in life.

Enterprise learning seeks to develop competencies in students to enable them to effectively market appropriate and relevant skills to small business. Notwithstanding, enterprise learning has been the most neglected form of school learning.

Enterprise learning cannot be *taught* in isolation from the *experience* of the workplace and the community. For enterprise learning to occur, there needs to be a partnership between schools and small business enterprises where theory and practice can be integrated into the student's praxis. The resultant experience of *success* may lead to attitudinal change and development of a range of competencies which enhance the employability of the student.

Opportunities for lifelong learning for the student, the staff of the school, the small enterprise and the community begin to be realised through a dynamic learning partnership. In a learning partnership model, any party can initiate an idea for investigation and development. The school is but one of the stakeholders. Ideas should also come from the student themselves, the small enterprise or the community.

In this model, for example, a small enterprise may have a new idea for a product or service. They could approach the school to assist in the development of this product or service—from conception, to designing, to making prototypes, to marketing and promotion. Since the development of new products or services would involve a stakeholder partnership, a meeting/forum would be convened to determine the benefits of pursuing further development. If agreement were reached to pursue the initiative, then all parties would become engaged in a process of action research and development.

The school would actively work with the small enterprise through a nominated staff member and student (or students) who were interested in development of this concept. The learning is conceptualised in an adult learning framework and is enterprise learning. The learning is problem-based, real, immediate and has application. The results of the process of active

stakeholder participation are relayed to the community and the benefits of the transaction to all parties are documented. As successes are accumulated, they are further built upon, marketed and promoted. This spiralling effect has enormous potential to begin to cement long-term relationships between all of the stakeholders and to substantially increase opportunity for all parties.

Summary

The theoretical framework developed in this section provides a model that moves structured workplace learning away from its narrow perspective into a whole of community and adult enterprise learning framework. Such a framework has the potential to provide greater opportunity, to assist in the rejuvenation of communities and to provide learning opportunities for all stakeholders.

All of this becomes possible when workplace learning is not viewed merely from the point of view of the school, the student and the curriculum, but viewed as a transaction between stakeholders based on mutual benefit and recognition of the student as a person in transition into adulthood and adult approaches to learning.

Implications for future development

This research was undertaken to investigate current practices in school–small enterprise links, to examine current literature in relation to structured workplace learning, to identify issues and common themes, to develop an integrated theoretical framework for structured workplace learning and to make suggestions regarding future directions. The research involved structured interviews with small enterprises, schools, VET practitioners, TAFE, community organisations and students in two Australian States—New South Wales and South Australia.

From the review of the literature and the research data, a theoretical framework was developed that proposes the exploration of new models of workplace learning and school and small enterprise learning partnerships. The framework proposes that VET and structured workplace learning need to be situated within a broader conceptual framework in order for stakeholders to more fully understand, analyse and be able to address the complexities of the issues involved.

The framework outlined in this report proposes the construction of learning partnerships whereby transactions occur between stakeholders that benefit each party and lead to the creation of a competent and multiskilled youth workforce. The framework explores the concept that young people in this process can 'add value' to the small enterprise, the school, the community and themselves. From the research the report develops three models that can be used to further promote and develop the concept of structured workplace learning in small enterprises.

This study has indicated that there is an urgent need to improve relationships between schools and small enterprises in order to foster structured workplace learning for young people. The exemplars of good practice provide some indications of the types of relationships, structures and mutually understood objectives that need to be established if the desired partnerships are to develop and prosper. The theoretical framework has been developed to illustrate the potential mutual benefit from a community-wide partnership approach. Consequently, the researchers make the following suggestions for improvement in the quality of outcomes for young people and small enterprises:

- the need for greater awareness amongst all stakeholders of the potential benefits to enterprises and to young people of a well-organised and -conceptualised program of structured workplace learning
- the need for stronger links between schools and local business communities based on mutual benefit
- an analysis of how well-defined community partnership arrangements can ensure brighter futures for young people while building local prosperity as well as human and social capital
- the adoption of clear and explicit objectives related to enterprise learning that would lead to greater voluntary and enthusiastic participation of the small enterprise sector based on their perceived expertise in this vital area of the economy

Accordingly, the researchers highlight the need for:

- promotional activities and materials (including well-illustrated case studies) that increase awareness of the changes to senior secondary schooling in the vocational curriculum area and the associated benefits that result from these changes to students, businesses and the community, at large
- programs and funding arrangements which promote closer links between and active participation of small enterprise and education personnel in joint activities

- infrastructure funding that further develops community partnerships, fostering their autonomy in developing local arrangements for establishing work-based and community-based learning environments for young adults
- further development of enterprise education methodologies, materials and teacher preparation and in-service programs
- activities designed to more closely link education and business at the local community level and to be directly linked to regional economic and social development, and particularly to local skill shortages and over-the-horizon industry needs
- further research into and documentation of the *actual* benefits to various stakeholders in partnership models such as those developed in this study, particularly of the advantages to small enterprises as these appear to be the least understood and publicised
- further research into the operation of one or two best-practice models in order to understand more fully the dynamics and interplay between stakeholders within particular types of environments (for example, rural/metropolitan, low/high socio-economic status communities)

While, in recent times, more resources have been devoted to these aspects of vocational learning at school and system levels, with dramatic increases in student participation in VET levels, since this study began in 1998, there remain some significant gaps and areas for further development. Adequate resourcing of structure workplace learning programs is a case in point.

Schools are, by and large, struggling to manage the demand for VET programs (from students and their parents) and their associated structured workplace learning programs. This is due partly to the often inflexible timetable and staffing structures of these schools, but most often this is a factor of the way secondary teachers have been trained and an indicator of their lack of preparation for a changing workforce and the VET national curriculum.

Small enterprises are also feeling under pressure from this increased demand for structured work placements. In most current situations the potential benefits have not been defined and therefore are not understood or recognised by small enterprises.

Consequently, the increasing demand by schools for placements is often perceived as detrimental to the bottom line. In many industries dominated by small enterprises, for instance graphic design, placements are almost impossible to negotiate.

Incentives (possibly in taxation) for employers need to be explored, as do simulated work environments and 'workplace studio' concepts in areas such as design and multimedia.

Long-term solutions revolve around the implementation of this report's recommendations to enhance stakeholder awareness of potential mutual benefit derived from well-planned and implemented schemes.

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Appendices

A Interview proforma—schools personnel

B Interview proforma—students

C Interview proforma—small enterprises

D Discussion questions

Appendix A: Interview proforma—schools personnel

ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS

and

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

SMALL ENTERPRISE WORKPLACE LEARNING PROJECT

Interview with school personnel

SCHOOL: _____

PRINCIPAL: _____

CONTACT DETAILS: **Phone:** _____ **Fax:** _____

Email: _____ **Mobile:** _____

The purpose of this interview is to explore the school's role in workplace learning with small enterprises, and in particular the benefits and areas for improvement to promote student success at the placement.

1. Discuss the school's background to the establishment of structured workplace learning programs
   (Prompt – in this particular industry
   – issues, joys, problems)

2. What work is done with the small enterprise/organisation before student work placements?

3. What follow-up has been done by the school with the small enterprise/organisation after the student work placements?
   (Prompt – evaluation, review)

4. What is the involvement of the small enterprise/organisation operators in the school's vocational education and training curriculum or workplace learning program design?

5. What do you consider to be benefits to students, small enterprise/organisations and school of the structured workplace learning program?

6. How are students linked/matched to small enterprise/organisation operators? (Prompt – particularly those at risk)

7. Do you see your VET programs having any links to small enterprise/organisation training needs?

8. What do you think were the critical things students learned about work during their work placement in small enterprises/organisations?

Appendix B: Interview proforma—students

ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS

and

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

SMALL ENTERPRISE WORKPLACE LEARNING PROJECT

Student group prompt questions

NAME OF SCHOOL: _____

PROGRAM NAME: _____

The purpose of this group interview is to explore workplace learning experiences in small enterprises/organisations, and in particular the learning that has been achieved while students have been at the work placement.

1. What made you decide to undertake a work placement at your chosen enterprise/organisation?

2. What happened on the first day of the work placement?
(Prompt – greeting, structured program))

3. What sorts of things have you learnt during the work placement?
(Prompt – those on extended placement
– those on block release placement
– what were your expectations)

4 Think of something new you learnt at the work placement? How did this learning occur? Was it planned or did it just happen? How did you know that you had learned it?

5. Think about your experience during the work placement ...
How would you describe your experience of learning with the employer you were placed with?
(Prompt – left to my own devices, shown how to do things)

6. Was there a difference between what you learned at school and how it was done at the work placement? How did you manage this process?

7. What assessment documents were used to record your progress? How much input have you had in recording the progress? Do you think these are useful?
(Prompt – log book, booklet, assessment sheet)

In what ways are they useful?

8. Were you ever *tested* to see if you were competent at the tasks listed in the log book or assessment forms?
(Prompt – by when, how)

9. Describe how what you did at your work placement fits into what you are doing at school?

10. Has there been any mention of the key competencies as part of your work placement?
(Prompt – may need to describe key competencies)

11. Discuss any conflicts you have experienced at your work placement?
(Prompt – what were they about)

12. Was your work placement a part of a plan to set up your own small enterprise when you leave school?

13. Do you think it is important to spend some of your school time in a work placement? Describe your reasons.

14. What benefits has your work placement provided you?

Appendix C: Interview proforma—small enterprises

ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS
and
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

SMALL ENTERPRISE WORKPLACE LEARNING PROJECT

Interviews with small enterprises/organisations

NAME OF ENTERPRISE/ORGANISATION: _____

CONTACT PERSONNEL: _____

CONTACT DETAILS: **Phone:** _____ **Fax:** _____

Email: _____ **Mobile:** _____

Address: _____

_____

1. **PRELIMINARY**

Name of owner/proprietor
.....

a. How is the business owned? (sole proprietor, several owners or ...)

.....

b. Number of employees
Full-time .....
Part-time .....
Casual .....

c. In its current form, how long has the business been in operation?

less than two years .....
two to five years .....
greater than five years .....

d. How long have you been the owner/operator of the business in its current form?

less than two years .....
two to five years .....
greater than five years .....

e. Type of business? (e.g. manufacturing, agriculture, service, hospitality)
.....

2. **STRUCTURED WORKPLACE LEARNING**

a. How and when did you become involved in structured workplace learning?

.....

.....

.....

.....

b. **Structural arrangements**

i. What is your preferred time frame for student placements?

Extended placement? .....
Block placement? .....
(Prompt: will need to define each one)

c. What do you consider to be the benefits of structured workplace learning? Would these benefits change if you had the ideal time frame?

i. **Students**

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

ii. **Your enterprise**

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

3. a. **SCHOOL WORK PLACEMENT**

What has been your involvement in the design of any part of the school's structured workplace learning program?

Comment

.....

.....

.....

b. What do you know of the vocational education component in the school curriculum? Does this relate to the student's placement at your enterprise?

.....

.....

.....

c. **Would you like to be more involved? How?**

.....
.....
.....

d. Is there anything *limiting your involvement?*

.....
.....
.....

4. **ENABLING FACTORS**

a. What are the factors that have supported structured workplace learning in your enterprise/organisation? Can you think of a particular example to illustrate your views?

.....
.....
.....
.....

b. What are the factors that have tended to limit structured workplace learning in your enterprise/organisation? Can you think of a particular example to illustrate your views?

.....
.....
.....
.....

c. What were student characteristics which influenced the success or lack of success of these placements?

.....
.....
.....
.....

d. What were the critical things you believed students learned about *work* during their work placement in your enterprise/organisation?

.....
.....
.....
.....

e. Describe the characteristics of the *work (roles)* that the student(s) undertook at your enterprise/organisation.

.....
.....
.....
.....

f. What preparation do you believe students need prior to commencing a structured work placement?

.....
.....
.....
.....

g. What do you see as *your role in student workplace learning*?

.....
.....
.....
.....

h. What are the assessment tools (e.g. log book, record of achievement, assessment forms) used for structured workplace learning? Are they suitable to your enterprise/organisation? Are there aspects that need changing? Do the criteria relate to your workplace?

5. **FUTURE ISSUES**

a. Can you suggest ways in which the *skills, attributes* and *knowledge* imparted through structured workplace learning can be improved?

.....
.....
.....
.....

b. Can you suggest any *changes* that would improve links between school(s) and the structured workplace learning offered in your enterprise/organisation?

.....
.....
.....
.....

c. Can you suggest improvements that would lead to more successful pathways being created for students to enter small business?

.....
.....
.....
.....

d. Would you like to see a specific course set up to teach students about small business? What would be the role of structured workplace learning in that course?

.....
.....
.....
.....

6. **TRAINING STRATEGY**

a. Do you have a training plan for your employees as part of your overall enterprise plan?

YES ..... NO .....

b. Do you have a training plan for yourself as owner/operator of this enterprise?

i. YES ..... NO .....

ii. If YES

ON THE JOB..... OFF THE JOB .....

FORMAL ..... INFORMAL .....

c. What has been the frequency of training this financial year?

	Owner/Operator	Employee
• less than one week in total	.....	.....
• one to three weeks in total	.....	.....
• greater than three weeks in total	.....	.....

d. How important do you consider training to be for the future growth of your enterprise/organisation?

	Low				High
Owner/Operator	1	2	3	4	5
Employees	1	2	3	4	5

7. **LINKS BETWEEN SCHOOL STRUCTURED WORKPLACE LEARNING AND ENTERPRISE BASED LEARNING FOR OWNER/OPERATORS AND EMPLOYEES**

a. From what you know of other small enterprises ...

Do you think that it is more or less likely that they would be involved in structured workplace learning for school students if they are actively involved in staff training?

LESS		DON'T KNOW		MORE
1	2	3	4	5

b. Please explain

.....
.....
.....
.....

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Appendix D: Discussion questions

It is anticipated that this report will be used in different contexts to facilitate broad-range consideration of the issues it addresses (for example, school staff meetings, regional development board, ITAB executives and other professional associations).

Accordingly, the consultants have prepared a set of questions to facilitate these meetings. These questions do not form part of the report but are offered to assist with expanding the range of discussion about the topic.

1. What is the purpose of SWPL and how will broad-ranging community support for these outcomes be gained? How do students, schools and small to medium enterprises (SMEs) perceive SWPL and how do the similarities/differences impact on what needs to be achieved?

2. What are the mutual benefits for students, schools, and SMEs and how will we know when the processes established between these stakeholders are meeting these mutual needs?

3. What needs to be co-ordinated, and by whom, so that what SMEs consider to be important will be addressed, and how will what is suggested achieve improvement?

4. What would need to occur, with whom, and when, to establish a continuous improvement model for SWPL?

5. How are teacher attitudes central to what will occur in the development of SWPL? How can these different beliefs be engaged to ensure a common understanding and commitment to 'purpose, means and outcomes'?

6. What will be the most/least significant things(s) that can be done to achieve quality SWPL and what will be the implications for schools/school staff/enterprises?

7. Where will schools need to focus attention when relating to what enterprises consider valuable about SWPL?

8. When schools have reached their potential in SWPL what will the staff, students and enterprises be doing?

9. How will schools /enterprises know when the potential of SWPL has been reached?

10. If a school wanted to introduce a culture change process away from the dominance of academic results, what would be the outcomes, where would these outcomes be obvious and how would that change impact on school staff and enterprises?

11. Which aspects of these themes will best inform the documentation from here—case studies/exemplars; theoretical and contextual framework; and the final report?

12. How can schools add to staff involvement in SWPL, and what would need to occur to intensify this experience? What will take away from movement towards SWPL and what would divide the emerging cohesiveness supporting SWPL?

13 How can schools link more closely with 'area' planning and development of regional economies? What will be the role of civic entrepreneurs in the development of a broadly based capacity-building of social capital support of enterprise and vocational education, including SWPL?

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